

# Nurse Author: Who Me? Yes, You!

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## Abstract

**Background and Purpose:** Potential nurse authors may find writing a challenge, including managing the publication process from getting started through submission to revision of the work and its acceptance. This special article presents strategies to help inexperienced writers develop and hone skills for journal publication.

**Potential Publication Strategies:** Tips discussed here that may lead to manuscript acceptance include selecting a topic of interest, using motivational self-talk approaches and structuring time to write, choosing coauthors, targeting a journal for submission, writing strong sentences in active voice, developing a structured abstract, using correct citation and reference formats, understanding reviews and resubmitting the manuscript, and keeping momentum to produce continued writing results. Practical writing hints are also suggested for inexperienced writers.

**Relevance and Conclusion:** These strategies can help guide nurse writers in planning, navigating the system, and finding success as a published author.

**Keywords:** Authors; nurses; publication; writing.

Nurses have many stories to tell. Perhaps you wish to become a published author because you believe that you have an interesting situation that you want to share with others. However, maybe you are unsure if readers would find your topic of interest, or you do not know how to get started writing. Some professional conferences offer writing

sessions for attendees, including the Association of Rehabilitation Nurses (ARN) at the annual REACH conference. Although these conferences can attract large audiences, many times the information shared still only touches a small number of nurses due to conference date, location, and expense.

In this *Rehabilitation Nursing Journal (RNJ)* special article, members of the 2018 Editorial Board, all of whom are experienced authors, offer insightful advice for potential nurse writers who wish to become published authors. The purpose of this article is to give encouragement to inexperienced writers in order to develop and hone their writing skills. This article deals with specific strategies from selecting a topic to revising/resubmitting a manuscript for potential publication along with providing solid approaches to the challenges of becoming an author in a professional nursing journal. If you wish to become a published nurse author, consider these tips to help you on your way.

## Selecting a Topic of Interest

Linda L. Pierce, PhD, RN, CRRN, FAHA, FAAN, University of Toledo College of Nursing

Authors need passion, strategic thinking, and interesting topics. With nursing experiences come ideas for potential topics from practice, teaching, research and evidence-based

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practice (EBP) projects, as well as community and professional service. Nurse writers develop ideas based on what they see happening around them or by networking with peers in nursing practice. For example, back injuries among nursing staff would be a topic of interest. If five or 10 of every 100 nursing staff were to strain their backs over the period of 1 year, the costs would be tens of millions of dollars annually. Minor injuries can result in increased absenteeism, and major ones can result in lost jobs and expensive medical bills, not to mention the impact on the injured nurse. Other topics from practice that come to mind include workplace ethics (e.g., team collaboration and behavior), bullying and harassment, impact of light therapy on patients with cognitive deficits, or quality assurance initiatives (e.g., preventing patient falls, skin breakdown, or urinary tract infections).

Writers also come up with ideas based on teaching. For instance, nursing students may engage in dishonest behaviors in the classroom or clinical settings. Results of dishonest behavior can include failure on examinations and in clinical activities that eventually impact patient care. What are some topics a nurse could write about related to this topic? Other timely subjects may include clinical decision-making, strategies to reduce students' test anxiety, accommodations for students with disabilities, and human patient simulation using manikins and/or standardized patients or virtual and computer-based simulations for real-time clinical decisions in an environment that poses no risk to patients.

In addition, writers disseminate information from research and/or EBP projects. An exemplar of this is that accidental falls are a major issue in hospital settings, causing psychological and functional issues for patients, as well as financial burden for patients and healthcare organizations. Patient falls also impact nurses. A qualitative study might be designed to explore what a fall of an institutionalized older adult means to rehabilitation registered nurses and whether the fall experience changed these nurses' practice. Furthermore, an EBP project might be created based on these research findings to change practice or assist nurses and patients in combating outcomes of patients' falls. Other research topics might focus on nurses' 12-hour shifts and burnout, change-of-shift walking rounds, or workplace hazards (e.g., exposure to blood-borne pathogens or injuries). In addition, research results of patients' skin breakdown or pain management issues could target EBP projects to change and evaluate practice outcomes.

Finally, writers' topic ideas may come from community or professional service. As an illustration: A sudden event happens; for example, a spouse has a stroke. Family caregiver(s) are unprepared to deal with the stroke event. There is lack of convenient peer and professional support/

education available in their rural community. An online support group is started to help these caregivers deal with the consequences of caring for their family member. A nurse author can share innovative ideas from similar events as this one. Additional ideas for topics include new programs offered by community or professional organizations, such as a webinar for best practices (e.g., postfalls huddle: determining type of fall and preventability), community outreach (e.g., water pollution), creation of community programs (e.g., yoga, mindfulness), public school programs related to the opioid crisis, and free clinics in community for health/wellness care. Ideas can come from a wide variety of places.

Nurse writers' fresh, novel perspective on new issues or well-known topics may not be covered in any depth in the literature, leading to perfect ideas for manuscripts. Practical hints for topic selection involve talking with nurse peers at work or conferences. Network and reach out to others including other providers, patients and families, and community leaders (e.g., chief executive officers of healthcare organizations, school board presidents and members, city mayors and council members plus state and national congressional representatives). Be proactive online using social media (i.e., nursing organizations' Facebook and Twitter accounts) to garner writing topics and LinkedIn to identify mentors and colleagues with similar interests.

Do not assume that your idea has already been written about or that your everyday knowledge about this topic is prominent in the literature. But even if your topic is already covered in a journal article, do not be discouraged. There are at least 251+ nursing journals (International Academy of Nursing Editors, 2018) that accept manuscripts. The chances are good that your unique perspective for your selected topic will meet the needs of one of these or other professional journals. A professional librarian can help you conduct a literature review if needed and assist with identifying gaps in the literature. But sometimes getting started to write on a topic can be difficult, and self-motivation is needed.

### Using Self-Talk to Get Motivated to Write

Lelia Barks, PhD, ARNP, Tampa VA Research and Education Foundation

Self-motivation is a key to writing. Self-talk is the act or practice of talking to oneself, either aloud or silently and mentally. The "inner voice" of most people is chattering all the time; it is very human to engage in self-talk. What does it tell you about something you have never done before or only done once or twice? In novel situations, curiosity can lead to anxiety, which can produce negative self-talk; however, resilience strategies include engaging in positive self-talk, managing negative self-talk, being aware

of and managing emotions, and showing empathy (including for oneself) (Foster, Cuzzillo, & Furness, 2018). When faced with a challenge such as accomplishing something new (like writing a manuscript), resilience strategies such as the ones listed above may work.

Communication may be a way of negotiating commitments between the speaker and the hearer (Geurts, 2018). If this is true, communication with yourself can be used to reinforce a commitment to accomplish a given task or answer a challenge. Just as positive self-talk has been used in self-care for nurses (Crane & Ward, 2016), it can also be used to assist in moving forward toward a goal, for example, writing a manuscript. Healthy self-talk is a balance between affirmations and honest self-criticism that can help people to problem-solve and spur on to accomplishment, while knowing what is still needed or missing. Being aware of a positive balance with more positive than negative self-talk can help you to accomplish the task to which you have committed.

Historically, the creation of a manuscript takes about 120 days (Belcher, 2009) and is about a topic that the author knows well, so it is not necessarily difficult, but requires a time investment. Managing the work flow in a way that successfully leads to conclusion of a draft manuscript is essential. Engaging in positive self-talk can help to set aside the unknowns in writing, which may temporarily stop potential nurse authors. Nurse authors realize uncertainties of writing can be resolved and overcome through the writing process. In self-talk, people provide opinions and evaluations on what they are doing as they are doing it (Whitbourne, 2013). One important thing to notice is when you are saying and hearing negative self-talk. At that moment, you can decide whether to address any criticism you are hearing and then tell yourself something encouraging. The single most important thing you can do is to answer the thought that your writing is already known or not needed with this self-talk: Tell yourself that you are eminently qualified to write on your subject and that it will make a difference in patients and nurses' lives, because it *will*. Even when there are coauthors, your writing is uniquely yours and deserves to be shared. As a writer/author you need to practice self-talk that allows you to make this contribution. If you are not sure where to start with your idea, just start somewhere and begin to put words on paper.

### **Allocating Time to Write: Find Joy in the Journey**

Michelle Camicia, PhD, RN, CRRN, CCM, NEA-BC, FAHA, Kaiser Foundation Rehabilitation Center

Allocating time to write among many commitments and leisure interests takes intention. Writers need to make

a schedule and stick to it. Let me give a personal story in this section: I choose to be a writer. I am also a mother, wife, full-time healthcare leader, gardener, and so forth, and I was a graduate student. Here are some strategies that worked for me. First, find the joy in the writing experience. It may feel like a task rather than pleasure if you are writing for school or have another requirement to write. However, enrolling in school was a choice, right? Writing is also a choice—do find the pleasure in it! Identify with the wonderful opportunity you have to express your thoughts and creativity and to share your ideas. Evaluate how you spend your time and replace non-value-added time such as watching television or other screen time with writing. Find the joy in being a nurse writer, and you may become a nurse author.

Part of finding this joy is to discover an inspiring location to write. Discover the time and place that works best for you that allows your thoughts and creativity to flow. Perhaps the luxury of watching the snow fall with a warm fire or the background sounds of the birds singing in the garden at dawn will give you inspiration. If you are a “morning person,” the most productive time to write is the first half of the day. Bounce out of bed and get right to the writing. It is also a time when there is solitude necessary to write in a busy household. Be creative with making time to write. Take public transportation or take the back seat of the car. My teenagers love it when my husband is driving and I offer up the front passenger seat. This is one of the best ways to avoid the guilt that I am neglecting my family in finding a place and time to write. Have a pair of spare headphones for them to listen to their music loud, leaving the quiet to you. It is a win-win situation and particularly beneficial on long drives.

Other strategies include allocating a specific amount of time to write daily. You can designate a set time frame to write (e.g., 1 hour) or a specific section to complete. I prefer the latter so that if I am in a rhythm I keep the momentum without interruption of a timer. Allow a short break between writing segments. Plan a schedule when you will write and provide yourself rewards for milestones, especially on long writing days. Get up and move in between time blocks to keep your energy up, refresh your mind, and enhance your circulation. You will also need to manage potential distractions when writing. Productivity is enhanced when distractions are minimized. One way to do this is to communicate with others if you need uninterrupted time. Put a sign on the door, or if necessary go to a location away from interruption. This will allow you to get in a rhythm and be productive in your writing.

Another approach that may work for you is to develop a system to capture your thoughts as they arise through the day. You can use the “notes” on your phone or the voice recorder for more involved ideas. While waiting in

line, use that time to brainstorm and capture thoughts/ideas for writing projects. Some authors carry a notebook with them at all times to jot down ideas. When it is time to write, these thoughts can be further developed. Allocate the right time and place, and you can find the joy in writing. Celebrate the results of your work and reflect on the value of your contributions. Delight in the moment that you are a nurse writer. Sometimes sharing the joy of writing will contribute to productivity. Ask yourself if your topic is best written alone or decide if you need to write with colleagues.

### Writing With Coauthors/Colleagues

Leslie Neal-Boylan, PhD, CRRN, APRN, FAAN,  
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There are substantial benefits to writing with colleagues, but there are important considerations before inviting coauthors to participate in a manuscript. A team of coauthors can improve the quality of the scholarship (DuBose & Haynes, 2017) and allow a distribution of the workload involved in manuscript preparation. There is satisfaction in sharing recognition with colleagues and in working as a team. To be listed as an author, one must contribute a significant and substantial portion of the work. Gone are the days when a first author added his or her mentors or colleagues as coauthors because the latter inspired or motivated him or her. All authors are expected to have the appropriate education and expertise that allow them to make a substantive contribution to the manuscript. Consequently, it is important for any new author to choose coauthors carefully. Not only must they have the necessary expertise in the topic, but they should also be experienced in scholarly writing and be able to serve as mentors. However, if there is a colleague you would like to include as a coauthor who has expertise but has never written for publication, be prepared to revise several iterations of the work. Not everyone will be receptive to this constructive criticism, so avoid the risk of losing a friend by choosing someone who will be receptive. Personality conflicts and rivalries can seriously undermine the process. It is important and necessary for the first author to set the ground rules early. Among them might be that the first author has the final decision if coauthors disagree on content or details pertaining to publication. Another option is that the majority rules.

Dependability is a key component to success. Busy people often agree to projects that seem doable at the time. Deadlines are important. If there is too much delay, your topic or slant on a topic will no longer be relevant or the journal may lose interest. There may be a temptation to submit a paper before all authors have had the opportunity

to review it. This is unprofessional and unethical, as is adding oneself to a colleague's manuscript without making a substantive contribution to the actual writing of the manuscript. Primack and Cigliano (2014) list the key elements to a successful coauthor relationship: trust, communication, assembling the right team, a shared vision and expectations, equitable credit, conflict resolution, and fun. They recommend a formal written agreement even if the coauthors are friends. The order of authorship and writing assignments should be negotiated prior to any agreement. The agreement should include expectations and deadlines. A clause stipulating the consequence of not meeting deadlines, such as removal from the paper, should be included. Stipulate what will happen if a coauthor refuses to allow the manuscript to move forward or decides to withdraw before publication. Consider removing the person's name from the list of authors but acknowledging their contribution in the article. Utilize this strategy to acknowledge others who have contributed helpful information but have not written a substantial portion of the manuscript.

Just as selecting and collaborating with coauthors on certain topics or research is important, so is selecting the journal for submitting your work. Your manuscript needs to fit the readership of the journal, so selecting a good fit is a key to success in getting published.

### Selecting the Right Journal for Submission—Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

Theresa L. Green, PhD, MSc, BScN, RN, Queensland University of Technology/Faculty of Health/School of Nursing

Nurse authors, alone or with colleagues, need to consider the right journal for their scholarly work, and this decision should begin at the start of the writing process (Noyes, Pearson, Thorne, Turale, & Watson, 2014). Consider these questions: What are you writing about? Are you presenting a nursing intervention for a specific patient group or assessing the results of a new model of care? Are you reporting the results of a study related to a new method of teaching? Are you hoping to transform your work-based clinical assignment into a potentially publishable article or to publish your research, EBP project, and/or the literature review (Cleary, Lopez, Jackson, & Hungerford, 2014)?

Think about your intended target audience and where you want your work to have the most impact. For whom are the outcomes most relevant? Does your work pertain to a specific geographic area, or is it potentially transferable to national or international audiences? Is your work best situated in a nursing journal or a journal focused on your clinical population of interest (Wood, 2018)? How timely are your results in relation to current research in the field of study? You may feel that there are more



questions than answers, and you have not even started the project or writing about your work yet!

As a first step, do consider whether your work is best suited for a clinically focused journal or an academic journal (Lewallen & Crane, 2010). It is essential to identify the intended audience and journal (Cleary et al., 2014). Nurses working in clinical practice often carry out audits or initiate EBP changes that can be shared with colleagues if sharing details is approved by one's organization (Wood, 2018). Given the complexity inherent in providing patient care, nurses increasingly are turning to the literature to obtain up-to-date practice guidelines and models to guide care across multiple practice settings (Stevens, 2013). A publication in a clinical journal is more likely to be read by frontline nurses, whereas researchers may look to publish in a journal with a high impact factor. Journal impact factor refers to the number of citations a journal receives in a given year that is typically provided as Thomas Reuters or Scientific Journal Rankings at <http://Thomsonreuters.com/Thomson-reuters-web-of-science>.

Another strategy in deciding what journal to choose is to look at the reference lists you have generated in preparing your guideline or EBP or research protocol to see what journals the publications came from. This may help you target the right journal and audience for your work. Always look at several issues of the journal you are considering to be sure that your manuscript is a good fit.

As you can see, disseminating your work can look like a daunting task. However, knowing the expectations of the journal you are writing for will help you in structuring your manuscript, and typically, each journal has very specific instructions for authors (Saver, 2017), including *RN*. It is very important to read these instructions before you start writing, as they will help you with practical issues, such as what referencing format to use, font accepted, framing the abstract, use of headings and subheadings, and acceptable length of manuscript. It can also be a good idea to check with the journal editor if you have questions about the “fit” of your work with the scope of the journal. Most editors welcome inquiries from potential authors, and it may well save you time and effort.

Words of caution—new journals are introduced every year, both subscription-based and open access, and potential authors may receive multiple e-mails asking for submission of manuscripts. Subscription-based journals require transfer of ownership of the article to the publisher, and readers are charged fees to access journal content. Open access journals allow the authors to retain copyright but charge the authors a fee (article publishing or processing charge) for publishing their manuscript in order to provide free and immediate access to the public. It is important to be able to separate legitimate scholarly biomedical and

nursing journals from potential predatory ones (Mauk, 2018; Oermann et al., 2016; Shamseer et al., 2017). Some potential indicators of a potential predatory journal may include homepage spelling errors and distorted images, promotion of a false impact factor, incorrect database index (e.g., Google Scholar, which is not an indexing database, versus PubMed, MEDLINE, CINAHL), unverified editors or editorial board members, and lower article processing fee (Beall, 2016; Shamseer et al., 2017). Choose a journal carefully for your manuscript submission and then focus on the writing.

### Writing Strong Sentences in Active Voice

Laura Cox Dzurec, PhD, PMHCNS-BC, ANEF, FAAN, Boston College Connell School of Nursing

You have a targeted journal in mind, so some thought and writing skill will be required to succeed with your goal. Rule number 1: Write for clarity and simplicity. Make your readers' job easy. As a faculty member, I often have occasion to invite student writing. In my directions to the students sitting before me, my recommendations typically include the directive to keep it simple. In response to my directive, students often look at me askance. Considering all we have to say about significant nursing issues, how can that be the approach to take? The answer is simple, if paradoxical. Where writing is concerned, simplicity rules. As a nurse author, you will be more in command of your topic than will your audience, and the key to conveying your story is ease for you as the author and for readers as consumers of your work.

There are good ways and not-so-good ways to make a point. For example, in describing an approach to writing, one might—with complete legitimacy—say something like this:

*Long, rambling, convoluted clauses, some subjunctive, some independent, all appropriately connected and chock-full of nouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, expressed occasionally in active and occasionally in passive voice expressing wishes, commands, or suggestions in past or present tense with number matching for subjects and verbs are to be eschewed.*

Who would want to read pages and pages of sentences that are complex and, frankly, ridiculous? Imagine the trauma of trying to diagram a sentence that multifaceted! Here are three tips to strengthen your writing.

First, use active voice so you can express the knowledge you want to convey in straightforward, short sentences. The notion of voice is pretty simple. Active voice looks like this: “The author thanked the program sponsors.”

The order of terms in sentences written in active voice is subject (the author), verb (thanked), object (the program sponsors). In passive voice—which should, as noted with tongue-in-cheek above, be eschewed—the sentence, “The author thanks the program sponsors” would look like this: “The program sponsors were thanked by the author.” The object of the sentence (the program sponsors) often occurs first in a sentence written in passive voice. If you use enough passive voice in your paper, readers will soon struggle to discern who is doing what to whom. An occasional sentence in passive voice, for example, when describing statistical procedures, as in “multiple regression was used to analyze the data,” is acceptable. But overall, avoid passive voice.

Second, make sure the number of your subject and your verb match: one *cow jumps* over the moon (singular subject; singular verb); many *cows jump* over the moon (plural subject, plural verb). A common error that novice writers make looks like this: “The patient takes their medication at different times.” The patient (singular) and their (plural) do not match within the sentence (even though, currently, to avoid gender-related issues, authors and advertisers are writing “the patient will use their...”). This sentence would be written correctly as, “The patient (singular) takes his/her (singular) medication at different times.”

As you organize your sentences, make sure the subject and verb, not some prepositional phrase and your verb, are matched. Here is a clarifying example: “The *output* from the many data points *was* informative.” In this sentence, the phrase “from the many data points” is not what was informative. It was the “output,” the subject of the sentence. Matching the verb number with a phrase preceding it often trips up authors. Be sure that you are matching the subject and the verb, not some descriptor of the subject and a verb.

Finally, make sure that prepositional phrases—and they should be used sparingly—are placed correctly (oops!! passive voice) within their conveying sentences. Here is a negative example: “The nurse placed the medications that were ordered for the patient on the table.” This sentence says that the patient was on the table. Perhaps the author meant to say that the nurse placed the medications on the table. The sentence could be written simply as: “The nurse placed the patient's medications on the table.”

Following basic rules of grammar is important in good (and publishable) writing. It will make your work abundantly readable and interesting. Because your abstract will introduce your paper, it needs to contain strong sentences. So we turn, next, to how to write a compelling abstract.

### Awe-Inspiring Abstract Writing 101

Deborah Almauhy, PhD, JD, RN, CRRN, CEN, CPHQ, Emory Rehabilitation Hospital

An abstract is a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that describes a larger body of work (The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018). Despite the fact that an abstract is brief, it must do almost as much work as the multipage paper that follows it. Numerous sources can be found in the literature on how to write an abstract. The format found in most publications on how to write an abstract is recipe-like in nature and generic to any discipline or field of study. The one standout element to be underscored for an exceptional abstract is to write one that is crafted in a clever yet academically sound manner to be read and draw attention to your work. The abstract must market your manuscript just as a trailer for a movie generates interest to a specific audience.

The abstract is the cherry on top of the chocolate sundae of your manuscript. Often it is done in a hurry, without the painstaking detail that came before in the body of the work. The abstract is *written* last. It is literally the mining of words from your written manuscript of approximately 100–300 words; the RNJ abstract is a max of 150 words. The abstract illuminates the motivation and purpose of your work and builds trust with your reader. The abstract can stand alone. It seduces the reader into intellectual curiosity of your topic.

The title, abstract, and key words or Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) headings play a major pivotal role in the communication of your topic (Editage Insights, 2018). The searchable MeSH database can be found at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/mesh> for choosing key words. Think of your abstract title as the “brand equity” for your manuscript. It has energy, yet is poised with crisp language of the idea that christened your launch into the topic at its inception. Electronic search engines, databases, and journal websites will use the words found in your title and abstract to link your paper to potential readers. Once found, the title and abstract may determine if the reader will purchase a full copy of your paper if there is a charge. The title and abstract are your first impression to journal editors and whether you pass “go” for the next stages of acceptance of your paper.

It is recommended that portions of your paper are not copied and pasted into your abstract and that you structure your sentences concisely with the same language and vocabulary as your full-length paper. Be alert to title and abstract formats specific to the arena where it is submitted; carefully read the instructions for authors. Many journals require a structured abstract, including RNJ. For a research abstract, denote (a) the purpose of the study, without a detailed background; (b) the design, including type of study, sample, and setting as applicable; (c) methods used to collect and analyze data; (d) findings; (e) conclusions; and (f) clinical relevance. Dr. Linda Pierce (2017),

RNJ Associate Editor, gives additional advice on writing a structured abstract in a recent editorial. For other topics, for example, literature reviews, EBP projects, or other issues of clinical relevance, instead of research, a structured abstract is still required for RNJ. Caution should be used against jargon, discipline-specific acronyms and excess verbiage. Words that fall into this trap weigh down the abstract and can quickly lead to boredom with the subject matter.

In summary, read your abstract critically prior to submission to double-check that the ideas that you presented are clear and concise, the language is clear-cut, statements are specific and objective, and the conclusions are supported in your paper. Do not procrastinate writing your abstract; write your abstract while your ideas are fresh in your mind. Get it done, and awe your readers with your work! And by the way, although there are no citations or references in any abstract, both are used in writing the text of your manuscript. For RNJ, the writing format used is the American Psychological Association (APA) that is discussed in the next section.

### Structuring Your Manuscript—the ABCs of APA Format

Terrie Black, DNP, MBA, RN, CRRN, FAHA, FAAN, University of Massachusetts Amherst College of Nursing

Most nursing journals require the APA (6th edition) format in constructing a manuscript (APA, 2010). For new authors, becoming familiar and proficient with the APA format for writing the paper, including citations and references, can be as challenging as learning a new language. However, using the APA style is essential for writing in the social sciences, as well as for RNJ. Nurses are generally not taught APA format; rather they are expected to learn it by doing. Although there are books on the topic, as well as apps and websites, many people do not have the desire (or time) to look up the specifics of using APA. This brief summary highlights common mistakes typically observed with the 2010 APA format by this nurse author, with suggestions for correcting those mistakes.

### Referencing Sources

When citing an article with several authors in the text, if there are five or fewer authors, you must spell out all the last names the first time you cite the source. Thereafter, you may use et al. For example:

*Although APA can be somewhat tricky, students typically improve the more they practice (Black, Lobelo, Gaga, Perry, & Swift, 2018). The most recent study on this topic revealed that having 11 or more written assignments often makes students feel like APA-style gurus (Black et al., 2018).*

Please note the punctuation, as there is a period after al., then a comma before the year. When citing sources, you spell out the word “and” within the text of your paper and use the ampersand symbol (&) for citing sources in parentheses. Here is an example:

*Black and Wirt (2018) addressed elements of successful transitions of care. Elements of successful transitions of care have been identified (Black & Wirt, 2018).*

Remember that the period goes *after* the sentence and parentheses (not before the parentheses). In addition, when citing sources, you *do not use initials when citing authors in text* (e.g., correct = Black, 2018; incorrect = Black, T. M., 2018).

### Reference List

In the APA style, a reference list is used rather than a bibliography (APA, 2010). What is the difference? A bibliography lists all references that an author reads whether they are cited in the article or not. A reference list consists of all sources cited in the text of an article, listed alphabetically by author's surname. Therefore, be sure that each reference listed is cited within the paper. The reference list is in alphabetical order by first author's last name, double spaced with a hanging indent after the first line. This means that the first line is flush with the left margin, and each subsequent line is then indented by 0.5 inches (APA, 2010). Many journals prefer that journal names are spelled out. For instance:

Black, T., & Vital, C. (2017). Changing the research landscape. *Rehabilitation Nursing*, 42(2), 55–57.

### Other Tips

Apply the same font (e.g., 12 point, Times New Roman) throughout a paper; include headers, and double space the entire text. Use headings to differentiate the different sections/topics within the paper. Remember that scholarly writing implies writing in the third person unless it is explicitly intended to be more informal such as this article. It is best to not use the words “I” or “me” or “we” but rather “The author...” or “This student.” When using abbreviations, be sure to spell out the word along with the abbreviation the first time it appears in the paper, for example, Rehabilitation Nursing Certification Board (RNCB). Thereafter, you may just use only the abbreviation: RNCB. Do not start a sentence with a written number; rather spell out the number. In general, use numerals to express numbers 10 and above and spell out numbers less than 10 (APA, 2010). As an illustration:

Correct = Three of the four rehabilitation nurses passed the certification exam.

Incorrect = 3 of the 4 rehabilitation nurses passed the certification exam.

Be sure to access APA resources (such as Purdue Owl, which is a free, online resource), proofread, edit, write, and rewrite—this process is extremely important. Remember, just like any activity, practice makes perfect in successfully using the APA format! With the formatting for your manuscript is completed, it is time to submit the manuscript to your chosen journal and wait for a decision.

### **Receiving and Responding to Reviewer Critiques—What Do You Mean, My Manuscript Is Not Accepted?**

Grace B. Campbell, PhD, MSW, RN, CRRN, University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing

After submission of your abstract and manuscript, be prepared to wait from several weeks to several months for an initial determination, depending upon the journal. This wait is a normal part of the process as the editor screens the manuscript, locates qualified reviewers, and waits to receive the reviewers' written feedback before making a final decision. Finally, your e-mail inbox holds the news you have been anticipating: "Manuscript Review Determination."

Contrary to your expectations, your manuscript is not likely to be immediately accepted. It is normal to feel discouraged or even angry at this news. Very rarely is a manuscript accepted without revisions on the first submission, even for seasoned authors. If your submission is not accepted on the first try, you are not alone! Give yourself a few days to be disappointed and then thoughtfully consider reviewers' and editor's feedback and begin to plan your response. Responding to reviews is an integral part of authorship that will greatly strengthen your final product (Noble, 2017), if you follow some key guidelines for revising your paper.

#### ***Handling Outright Rejection***

Sometimes an editor will reject your manuscript completely. In fact, rejection is the most common response to manuscript submissions (Duffy et al., 2017). A rejection notice may be received because of various reasons, including the paper was not felt to be of interest to the journal's readers, the manuscript type is not published by that journal (e.g., some journals will not publish literature reviews or instrument development papers), the sample size or methods of your research study were deemed too small or flawed to be scientifically impactful or generalizable (e.g., some journals will not publish pilot or exploratory studies), or a number of other reasons. Locate a different journal

whose mission more closely matches your manuscript and submit again. Do this as soon as possible. Colleagues or a reference librarian can help to identify alternative journals; occasionally, the editor of the initial journal will suggest other options. Locate the journal's information for authors and reformat your manuscript accordingly to those author instructions. If you received reviewers' comments with your rejection, consider incorporating this feedback into your revised version before submitting to the new journal (Annesley, 2011). Such comments are essentially "free" advice and are often worth heeding.

#### ***Handling a "Revise and Resubmit" Determination***

If the editor is willing to reconsider a revision, it *may* be considered for publication once necessary revisions are made. Remember, though, that there is no guarantee your manuscript will be accepted after revision. You may be asked to further revise, often more than once, if the editor thinks the manuscript is promising, or the editor may decide that it is not a good fit for the journal after all, in which case, you should then look for another journal.

Key points to remember when revising your manuscript are summarized in Table 1. In addition to these points, it is important to be respectful and polite in your response to the editor and to convey appreciation for the reviewers' time and thoughtful comments. Reviewers are scientists, clinicians, and authors themselves who volunteer their services to the journal, and most are genuinely interested in helping you to improve your work. It can be difficult to respond politely and appreciatively to comments, especially those that may feel harsh or overly critical. A sample reviewer comment with author response is included in Table 2.

#### ***Handling Disagreements With Review Comments***

What should you do if you feel that a reviewer's comment is incorrect or misguided? Authors are not obligated to follow every suggestion; however, they should carefully consider each suggestion. For suggestions not taken, a respectful and careful explanation of the authorship team's thought process, with supporting references if appropriate, is recommended. Before deciding to reject a suggestion, consider whether a compromise might be appropriate. For example, consider including your rationale in the revised manuscript; chances are that if a reviewer has a question or concern, other readers may have the same question. Including in your explanation as to why an alternative approach was not taken in the manuscript can help the reviewers' or editor's comprehension of your paper. A sample of such a response appears in Table 2.



**Table 1** Key Points for Responding to Manuscript Reviews

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- Allow time to be angry or disappointed at the reviews. Set the review aside for several days after initially reading it. Don't wait too long, though, as some journals set a deadline for resubmission of revised manuscripts.
  - After any negative feelings about the reviews subside, consider the feedback carefully. Be open-minded and try to see the reviewer's viewpoint. If the reviewer did not understand something you wrote, it is your responsibility to make the passage clearer.
  - Meet with your coauthors to establish a plan for revisions based on what is requested. Who will complete any additional statistical analyses requested? Who will identify additional literature? Who will provide additional interpretation of results?
  - If there are additional studies or analyses requested that you lack the resources to complete, begin to craft an explanation for the manuscript as to why these do not affect your initial results or consider listing the lack of certain types of analyses as a study limitation.
  - If there are reviewer comments that you do not understand, or if a reviewer asks for extensive additions that will exceed the journal's length requirements, or for any other questions, e-mail the editor and politely request guidance.
  - Begin the response to each comment with a direct answer to the question, and be positive (e.g., thank the reviewer for the astute observation).
  - Address every comment from every reviewer. Include these in a table or grid as requested by the journal, and be sure to highlight the changes made in the text as required.
  - Realize that adding material requested by reviewers does not exempt the paper from the journal's length requirements. Be prepared to edit and cut other text to meet the required length.
  - Follow instructions for submitting your revision exactly. Failure to do so may result in the manuscript being rejected.
  - Have a colleague read your response letter carefully to be sure that your tone is respectful.
- 

Note that your resubmission consists of two primary components: the revised manuscript itself and a letter detailing each reviewer's concern and your response to that concern. Also, be sure to highlight any changes in the manuscript as instructed. The revised manuscript is important, but the letter should not be approached as simply a formality. This is your opportunity to convince the editor and reviewers that you have thoughtfully considered their suggestions for improving your manuscript and to "sell" them on the importance of the manuscript, so be sure to allow sufficient time for creating this document. The letter can be formatted as a narrative; however, it can also be helpful to include a table in which each reviewer's comment is listed in the left column and the author's responses are detailed and explained in the right column. Regardless of the format, remember that each reviewer's comment must be included. If more than one reviewer made the same comment, then respond to the comment from the first reviewer; it is not necessary to repeat the response. Instead, a phrase such as "See

response to comment 1, Reviewer 1" is sufficient. You will receive instructions for preparing and uploading your revision, your response to reviewers' comments, and any other required documentation. These instructions must be followed or your revised manuscript may not be accepted for review.

### Secrets to Building Your Scholarship: Always Have a Project

Kristen L. Mauk, PhD, DNP, RN, CRRN, GCNS-BC, GNP-BC, ACHPN, FAAN, Colorado Christian University School of Nursing and Health Professions

Congratulations! You submitted your manuscript and received an editorial decision. If it was accepted for publication, celebrate. However, some wonderful career advice that was given to me years ago was "do not become discouraged with rejections" and "always have a project going." Over many years, those who publish prolifically repeat the same motto to inexperienced nurse writers. By continuing research or EBP projects or other work, one keeps a momentum going toward authorship. Another well-published nurse scientist told me that she made it a personal rule not to go on to another project or research study until she had submitted her last presentation for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Now, although not all writers could aspire to such a guideline, there is merit in always having a project to work on. Three major strategies for continuing professional development are emphasized here to help nurses build their scholarship.

First, determine the focus of your particular clinical practice, teaching, projects, and/or service. Although this may take some time and mentoring from more seasoned nurses, choose an area of interest and passion that can keep you busy, further your career, and advance the profession or specialty. Ask yourself: "What would I like to be best known for in rehabilitation nursing? What area do I have the most excitement about? Where is my strongest experience and expertise? What could I see myself working on for a life's scholarly endeavor?" If in doubt, ask your friends, coworkers, peers, or even family members what they see you as most passionate about in nursing.

Next, get busy planning projects. For instance, join a research or EBP team or collaborate with more experienced nurses to get started. Do not be afraid to submit clinical case studies or experience-based learning for presentations or manuscripts. Not all of your publications need to be research. Make it a goal to have some professional project in your specialty area on which you are continually working. Set reasonable goals to accomplish the dissemination of your knowledge and skills so that your valuable insights do not end up in a drawer. Do

**Table 2** Sample Responses to Reviewer Comments

	Reviewer Comment	Author Response
Response to reviewer #1 comment: suggestion was followed.	Line 138: A majority of the sample (59.7%; n = 426) endorsed some degree of mobility disability (defined for this analysis as a score >0), yet in Table 1 the groups are separated into those who score >1+ (n = 375). This is confusing. What happened to the 51 other patients?	We thank the reviewer for noticing this error. The number in line 138 was a clerical error from an old analysis that we have corrected. The abstract and body of the manuscript (now page 7, Line 148) are consistent with Table 1. We have also changed the notation in column 3 of Table 1 from “1+ mobility disability” to “≥ 1 mobility disability” to improve clarity.
Response to reviewer #2 comment: suggestion was not followed.	The authors should categorize the data based on clinically significant mobility disability and report predictors of clinically significant mobility disability or severe mobility disability (at least 4 or 5 out of 10) versus less severe mobility disability, rather than an analysis looking at explanation of model variance.	We thank the reviewer for raising this important question. In response to this comment, we divided the sample into relatively equal groups, based on severity of mobility disability, into none (0; n = 250), mild (1–4; n = 186), and moderate-severe/clinically significant (5–10; n = 189). We then compared the three subgroups with respect to demographic and clinical variables to determine whether there were differences that would suggest different predictors of mobility disability among the groups. The groups did not differ significantly, so we feel that our original modeling of variance explained is a valid analytic approach. We are also concerned that categorizing continuous variables, especially with fewer than 5 categories, could lead to a loss of important information. However, you have raised an important consideration, so we have modified the manuscript to include our analysis of similarities and differences among the mobility disability groups so that readers are clear as to our selection of analytic techniques.

not be discouraged if not all of your projects get published. Perseverance and careful planning go a long way in increasing your scholarship.

Lastly, maximize your time spent in scholarly activities to make the most of your attendance at conferences (Brown & Schmidt, 2009). The resources committed by your employer or you personally can be wisely expended through advanced planning. For instance, if one is attending the annual ARN REACH conference mainly for continuing education, consider submitting a paper, poster, workshop, or symposium abstract. Once your work is accepted and presented at a conference, write a manuscript and submit it to *RNJ* or another journal of your choice.

Conclusion

In this article, the *RNJ* Editorial Board authors highlighted steps that inexperienced writers can take toward becoming a nurse author. Potential publication strategies included selecting a topic of interest; using motivational self-talk approaches and structuring time to write; choosing colleagues as coauthors, or not; targeting a journal for submission; writing strong sentences in active voice; developing a structured abstract; using correct citation and reference formats; understanding reviews and resubmitting your

manuscript; and keeping momentum to produce continued writing results. Practical writing hints were also suggested. Carefully executing writing plans can lead to sharing clinically relevant ideas for nursing practice as well as answering the question of *Nurse Author: Who me?* Yes, it can be you!

Conflicts of Interest

Dr. Mauk is President and consultant for Senior Care Central/International Rehabilitation Consultants. Other authors declare no conflict of interest.

Key Practice Points

- Nurses need to share information through publication in order to build rehabilitation nursing science.
- Potential nurse authors often find it challenging to get started with a writing project and see it through submission, revision, and acceptance for publication.
- These suggested writing strategies, from selecting a topic to stepping through the journal publication process and keeping momentum going, provide a plan for novice as well as experienced nurse writers in finding success as a published author.

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