

# Successful writing for nurses: publications and academic assignments

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Ashwanden, C. (2014). Successful writing for nurses: publications and academic assignments. *Renal Society of Australasia Journal*, 10(2), 84-85.

Submitted: 7th March 2014, Accepted 1st April 2014

## Abstract

Reasons for wishing to get an article published in a journal include the personal and professional satisfaction of achieving something worthwhile and contributing to better renal care that is significant. This article aims to encourage nurses to be brave in order to write a first article and submit it to a journal. Strategies and barriers are identified to assist this process.

## Introduction

I know how difficult it is to get down to writing an article but journals need your knowledge so this is an impassioned plea to all of you to consider writing an article. As a retired editor, I have spent the last seven years helping others write for journals and academic assignments from bachelor degrees through to doctorates, so I feel I have some experience in what is needed. I will, in this article, endeavour to offer my experience with some helpful hints on how to write successful articles. My main aim is to encourage you to write articles and to undertake academic courses for higher degrees. No one knows what they can do until they try. The effort of producing a good article or assignment is always worthwhile.

## Writing for a journal

There are various reasons for wishing to get an article published in a journal. It is good for your personal résumé and continuing education. Seeing your name in print is another bonus and it might be financially rewarding, though that is doubtful, certainly in the United Kingdom and Australia there is little monetary encouragement to write. However, it is the personal satisfaction of achieving something worthwhile and maybe contributing to better renal care that is probably the most significant. So have faith in yourself. If you think you have something important to say, then trust yourself and write a paper. It is not easy as the time has to be found from busy working schedules but please do put down your ideas and get them published. Without them everyone is the poorer. The feeling of satisfaction from success rewards all the time spent doing the necessary research.

When aiming to write for a journal it is good idea to read other articles in that journal because from them you will see the kind of language used and the type of paper that is accepted. Check the requirements in the guidelines for authors, noting the total number of words permitted and the word limit for the abstract. Be careful about which system of referencing is required. There is little that makes a paper rejected more often than incorrect referencing, so make sure you use the accepted style and check the required style of producing figures (International Standards are generally the most usual).

A common mistake is to think that the article for a journal can be a version of an academic assignment. That is not so. The articles published in a journal are not a truncated version of your latest academic assignment unless you have been very clever. The information is the same and the format for the article has to follow the plan of method, results and outcomes which are the same as for academic work, but with the big difference that readers of journals want immediate information with proof that something will or will not work. Your readers do not want all the details required for academia, so keep the information succinct and relevant with results that can be easily assessed. You need to be passionate about your subject. If you have something you feel should be said, then please write it down briefly putting your aim, which is what you hope to achieve through this article, and already you will have the outline of your article. The aim of what you wish to change or establish is the centre of your article. Once you have decided what is your aim you can plan the rest of the article. Never underestimate your readers' knowledge by writing down to them, nor should you try to impress by using too highly technical language.

Journals today are the most used sources for research studies so

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your material has to be reliable and valid and as generalisable as possible; therefore your methodology has to be clear so that it could be repeated, and the findings easily understandable. If you have initiated something new or found different ways of using old knowledge or practices which work on your unit then write about it. It could be a step forward to better renal care. Progress is made through research and research is done using articles in journals, so you can see how important it is to keep writing articles for journals. I have known articles that have changed the procedure of governments, so be aware of what you can offer the renal world.

Writing an article has to follow the same principles as writing an academic assignment. There has to be an introduction to tell the readers what you are aiming for, the middle section will tell them how you planned to achieve your aims, which involves methods and the reasons behind your plans and finally the end which has to tell the readers whether you achieved your aims. Good planning will help write a successful article. Probably the most important part of an article for your readers is the findings with considerations on how or whether they can be used or not. This is what will make the article useful and hopefully might encourage others to do further research using your findings as the base. Writing the abstract should come last. This has to excite your reader to continue reading, so do not give away all your findings — just enough to encourage more reading.

### General hints

Beginning to write is the difficult bit for assignments or an article. There are many ways of starting to write but you do need to decide your aims, as I stated in the beginning of this article. The aims are what you are trying to achieve before you begin, they are the centre of any article and people do make the mistake of not having a clear aim when writing an article or an academic assignment. Titles are less important at this stage as they change and the abstract should be written last when the whole work is finished. Having decided on the aims of the project, print them out and put them where you can see them when working. You should work towards your aims and everything is focused round them. Next, define your objectives, which are what you hope to achieve while working towards the aims; these can be as important as the overall aim as they give signposts on the way to the conclusion. Once that is done you can start with the actual body of work. It is helpful to make a table showing the suggested word limit for each chapter, or article. Then you follow the already made plan with your original aims and objectives always in front of you. The conclusion is a summary of what you did, how you did it and what you have found, so keep it short. It is the final chapter and

should reflect the title and your aims, whether achieved or not. Finally, write the abstract, which gives an outline of the whole study but has to entice your readers into the study.

English grammar is a problem. The language is so full of exceptions that there are very few rules and even when accepting the rules one has to remember that language is a living thing and changes with time. There are some general points for any author to remember — commas are useful but too many break up the sense. Sentences tend to get very long and convoluted but stop worrying. Ask yourself what you wanted to say in your own language then translate it into English. It does work. Vary the length of the sentences, since this makes reading more interesting. Try to be uncomplicated and use English that is used every day. When you get to the end, stop, do not continue to pad out what you have said.

### Academic assignments

These are different to writing for a journal but the knowledge has to be the same.

Before you begin getting serious about this proposed degree, make lists of books and articles you have read, listing the author and the focus. Reading round the subject is very helpful and tutors do like to know what you have done. You will also benefit enormously from the wider knowledge you will gain rather than only focusing on the assignment. When starting out on an assignment, please make yourself a list (it seems all lists) but success lies in the planning, giving the structure — introduction, middle section, conclusion — and follow it. This is simplistic but it is the bare bones of any academic work; each chapter needs to be planned in the same way as the main structure — introduction, middle section and conclusion. It depends what level you are hoping to achieve but it is the standard of knowledge and the expression of it that differs, not the planning.

### Conclusion

Whatever you are hoping to achieve, be brave. Have faith in your ability to write and you will succeed. The author of the Harry Potter books had her first book rejected by many publishers so do not be downhearted if you get a rejection; try again, you too could become famous. Following a plan should help decrease any muddled thinking. But again, be brave, do write your first article and submit it to your journal. With success once assured, you will be excited enough to continue to write again for the benefit of your readers and the renal world.