

# From ideas to action: writing for publication

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## Summary

**T**his article provides key guidance on how to approach writing for publication in journals such as the *British Journal of Infection Control*.

## Introduction

It is clear that, for various reasons, much of the good practice and research performed by infection control nurses is not written up for publication. This may be because writing for your peer group may seem daunting, and appear to involve yet more taxing work when you are already busy.

However, it is vital that you give serious consideration to sharing your experience, research and insights – after all, you have valuable knowledge and your colleagues can benefit from knowing about it.

## Reasons for writing

So why should anyone publish? There are many reasons: disseminating good practice, celebrating success and informing others about potential pitfalls are all sound reasons to write for professional publication.

It could also be argued that we have a professional or ethical responsibility to share knowledge, as peer-reviewed publications contribute to developing the knowledge base of the profession.

Professional debates about important topics encourage critical analysis of clinical practice and decision-making. Sharing your experiences with others may help boost the profile of your project or place of work. At an individual level, it demonstrates your commitment to the profession, and seeing your work in print can be personally and professionally rewarding.

Having decided that you will write something for publication, you need to consider carefully what is it you want to say. At this stage it may be useful to discuss your ideas with your colleagues, your manager or even a lecturer. If you feel your work may be of interest to professionals in other areas, discuss your ideas with them.

## Types of papers

At this time, as you refine your ideas and become clearer about what you want to say in your paper, refer to the guidelines for contributors from the journal you are aiming to be published in (the *British Journal of Infection Control* guidelines are available on the ICNA website or request via email to [editor@bjic.org](mailto:editor@bjic.org)). What kind of papers do they publish? There are many types of articles published in journals and you should make sure the style of paper you have in mind is appropriate. Articles can be:

- Original research studies
- Systematic reviews of literature
- Non-systematic literature reviews – such as structured reviews or new insights
- Clinical articles – such as reflections or descriptions of new practice developments
- Debates – a clear, logical discussion of main arguments
- Case studies – these may be unique, well-described or of novel interest
- Editorials – such as viewpoints/personal view
- Letters to the editor.

Once you are clear about the required style, target audience and essential messages you mean to convey, you can start drafting a

structure for your paper. This often begins with a 'brainstorming' exercise before a structure starts to develop. For many writers, this stage of the process is very motivating, as it is easier to describe what your paper might look like and how to proceed.

Once you have reached this stage, it can often be useful to contact the journal editor to talk through your plans. Speaking with editors can often be very helpful, and talking about your paper to them makes it feel 'real'.

## Getting started

To help you get started, Table 1 provides a checklist for the process of preparing a paper for publication. There is no shortage of energy and passion among infection control nurses to talk about how they make a difference – and to learn from each other through sharing practice and research findings. Why not take this a step further and write about the good work you do?

Table 1. Writing for publication checklist

- Decide on a topic
- What is/are the key messages of your paper?
- What will your audience want to know? What would you want the paper to tell you, if you were reading the published paper?
- Draft a working title - keep focused
- Share your ideas with others you can trust - think about co-authorship
- Contact the editor to discuss your paper - is there any interest?
- Has anyone else published a similar topic? How does your work compare?
- Who do you want to read it?
- Which journal?
- What type of article?
- Obtain journal guidelines
- Plan article and draft in full. Think about the structure and clarity of the message.
- Have you provided enough information so that readers can make use of what you have to say
- Write the article according to journal guidelines
- Do you need local permission to publish? If so, obtain it
- Proofread final copy and check against journal guidelines
- Send final draft copy to journal editor, who will send it out for peer review
- Usually receive acknowledgement and estimated date for reviewer comments
- Revise based on comments from reviewers and resubmit, if appropriate
- Publish
- Retain a copy in your portfolio, with a note on what you learnt from your experience.

