

Preparing Research Manuscripts for Publication: A Guide for Authors

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The publication of peer-reviewed research articles is a hallmark of nurse leadership. Research is the foundation of evidence-based practice (EBP), a rigorous methodology defined by Sackett, Strauss, Richardson, Rosenberg, and Haynes (2000) as integration of the best research, clinical expertise, and patient values. The process of EBP ensures that nurses and other healthcare team members use methodologically and statistically sound research to produce guidelines or recommendations for treatment and patient-care decisions (Doorenbos et al., 2008). By ensuring that research used for clinical decision making is valid and accurately reported, healthcare teams can put recommendations into practice with confidence. An interesting research project or unique concept is not enough to guarantee that a manuscript will be accepted for peer review or recommended by the peer reviewers for publication. Publication depends on solid methodology, accurate references, potentially reproducible statistical outcomes, and conclusions drawn from the research.

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) has supported the publication of oncology nursing research for 40 years in the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)*, the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)*, and Putting Evidence Into Practice (PEP) resources as reported in *CJON*, textbooks, and electronic formats. The missions and foci of *ONF* and *CJON* are different; *ONF* strives to publish nursing research with findings applicable to oncology nursing practice, whereas *CJON* focuses on articles of clinical interest. However, the publication process is similar for the two journals. The core aspects of peer-reviewed literature remain unchanged, but evolving publication styles have altered the way manuscripts are written and prepared for print. This article will address issues related to the

publication of nursing research and manuscript preparation and provide tips for authors preparing articles for submission to peer-reviewed journals. Although this article is targeted toward *ONF*, many of the guidelines presented also are applicable to *CJON* and other scholarly publications.

Review Process

Peer review may seem to be the end of the submission process, but authors should know what is expected during and beyond that stage so that manuscripts, as submitted, are as accurate and complete as possible to ensure a timely and appropriate review. Editors and reviewers want every manuscript to have the best opportunity for a favorable review and publication.

Editorial Review

When a manuscript is uploaded into the *ONF* electronic manuscript system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/onf>), the editor is alerted that the manuscript is ready for consideration for peer review. At that point, the editor reads the manuscript, including supporting materials such as the cover letter, in its entirety for quality, relevance, and scientific interest, and reviews the credentials of the author(s). An obvious mismatch (e.g., a statistically complex manuscript by a single author without an advanced degree) might prompt a database search for other publications by that author or a query to the author to provide more detail on how the study was conducted. On the editor's determination that the manuscript is publishable, meets the formatting requirements, and fills the current publishing needs of the journal, three peer reviewers are invited to evaluate the manuscript. To prevent biased reviews, identifying author infor-

mation is removed from the manuscript (double-blinding) by an ONS editorial assistant before the manuscript is made available to reviewers. Review generally takes three to four weeks. When all reviews are complete, the editor reads each review, notes any additional areas for improvement, and decides whether to accept the manuscript pending revisions, require a revision and second review, or reject the manuscript. A decision usually is reached within eight weeks, and the author is notified by e-mail. Accepting a manuscript without any revision is rare; 52% of manuscripts are ultimately accepted for publication in *ONF* (ONS, n.d.).

Copyediting

Once a manuscript has been accepted for publication, the editor reviews it again and notes any additional queries for the author. Next, an ONS copy editor or staff editor receives the manuscript for editing. During this process, references are checked for accuracy and formatting, the text is edited for grammar and clarity, and the article proof is prepared for the author's review. At this stage, prompt resolution of remaining queries by the author is critical, and deadlines must be respected to ensure that the article goes to print on schedule. Tips for avoiding common errors that result in queries to the author are presented in Figure 1.

Manuscript Preparation

Presenting research: Not all research results should be published. Authors should be realistic in assessing what they have written. The manuscript as submitted for academic review may not be ready for publication without major revision. The recent surge in doctor of nursing practice (DNP) programs has