

Choosing a Publication Venue.

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Abstract:

The choice of a venue for publication of a manuscript is rarely a clear-cut decision. Several factors should be considered in this decision, such as the audience for whom you are writing, the topic of the manuscript, the purposes for which you are writing, and the journal guidelines. These factors may vary in importance to the author. Examining each factor and plotting the importance visually on a checklist will assist the author in making the decision about where a manuscript should be submitted so that the article will have the desired impact.

Keywords: manuscripts | publication | impact factor | dissemination of information | nursing | academic research | academic publishing

Article:

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION is the sine qua non of nurse scientists and the nursing discipline. Publication of ideas, opinions, innovations, and research is important in developing the science of nursing. Nurses may have their first experience with publication while a student in an academic setting. Producing the manuscript in the format of a class assignment or as part of academic requirements is usually the focus. The assumption is frequently made that nurses will know to which avenue to submit their manuscript for dissemination. However, when guiding students on choosing a publication venue by accessing the literature, it was noted that there is little to no formal guidance on how to target a manuscript. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide guidance on choosing an appropriate avenue for dissemination.

Historically, publishing was frequently from persons in academic settings. However, this pattern is changing. Nurses in service settings are frequently publishing clinical articles, results of innovations, or results of research. This increase in the number of publications from the service sector may be related to the American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Recognition Program®, which supports conducting research, quality improvement endeavors, and education. Further, with the increase in complexity of care, nurses are becoming greater consumers of the

literature to guide practice. As evidence-based practice models are evolving to determine best practices or best evidence in nursing, the publication of findings to support or change nursing practice is essential. More importantly, publishing in a manner to reach the appropriate consumer is vital.

The Internet, sophisticated search engines, and electronic communications have contributed to public accessibility of information that was previously housed in academic libraries. Therefore, targeting the dissemination of information to ensure easy and quick access is important. This article will review four areas to consider when disseminating your work: the audience, topic, purposes, and journal guidelines.

Targeting Your Manuscript

One of the primary issues to consider when seeking a publication venue for your manuscript is your target audience. Is your manuscript geared toward researchers, educators, administrators, practitioners, consumers of health care, or some other group? Once you have decided the audience, further consider the level of your audience. Most journals are quite clear in their author guidelines about the type of audience they attract, and it will save time if you pay close attention to this. If you are targeting researchers, is your manuscript more related to theoretical or methodological aspects of research, or do your research findings have a clear clinical application? For instance, some research journals focus on different aspects of research, such as instrumentation, whereas some clinical journals welcome research manuscripts if they have a clear clinical application. If you are writing for educators, some journals specifically target associate degree nursing educators, whereas others are commonly read by all levels of educators. There are journals that target administrators, but many clinical journals also print administrative articles, especially if the article concerns a particular clinical specialty.

When considering clinically focused journals, some are targeted toward advanced practice nurses, whereas others target the frontline staff nurse. Clinical journals are further separated into those journals that are geared toward generalists and cover topics related to various clinical specialties and those that specialize in a particular patient population, such as oncology. Publishing research in clinically focused journals may be one of the most direct ways to get your study findings to the nurses who can consider implementing them (Oermann et al., 2008).

Another factor to consider when targeting an audience is whether your manuscript speaks to a topic that would be of specific interest to nurses in a particular country, or whether it has

international appeal. Although most journals have international audiences, some journals are geared specifically toward international audiences and favor manuscripts that write with an international audience in mind.

Boards of nursing and professional certification agencies often require continuing education hours to renew licenses and certifications. Many journals publish articles that carry continuing education credit that can be used for these purposes. If your manuscript topic lends itself to a continuing education offering and you are willing to write learning objectives and posttest questions to accompany your manuscript, you may want to target journals that provide these types of articles.

If your desired audience is health care consumers, you will make some very different choices in your publication venue decision. With the help of a librarian, choose periodicals that are widely read by the type of consumer you want to target. Some periodicals geared toward the general public may not accept unsolicited manuscripts, so there may be a process of making your case to the editor that your manuscript would fit in that periodical and be of interest to its readers. The style of writing and the literacy level may be different from that of professional journals as well.

Topic

Aspects of your topic may also influence your selection of a journal for your manuscript. Determining the focus of the manuscript is paramount in selecting a publication venue. Foci of manuscripts may include case studies, reviews and syntheses of the literature, clinical information, state of the art practices, research reports, educational strategies, and knowledge dissemination. For example, a new research manuscript on care of the postsurgical patient may need to be targeted to a clinical research journal.

Another aspect when considering your topic is timeliness. If your manuscript covers a “hot topic,” one that is either very important to the science and must be published quickly or one that someone else may publish first if you are not timely, then you should choose a journal with a rapid turnaround time. How can you determine the turnaround time of a journal? One way is ask the editor. Most journals maintain statistics about the typical time it takes for a manuscript to be assigned reviewers, the time frame that reviewers have to complete the review, and the typical time for the final review to be completed. Another way is to communicate with authors that have recently published in that journal. Most journals have electronic mail contact information for their authors published in the articles, and most authors are happy to discuss their experiences. A

third way is to examine the published articles themselves. Some journals print when the article was received and when it was accepted for publication; you can then calculate when it was actually published to complete your information about the total time frame.

New journals are frequently being started. Enlist the services of a librarian to find out what journals are new in your area of writing. New journals tend to have less of a backlog of manuscripts, which may mean that your manuscript will be reviewed more quickly, and thus, your accepted manuscript will be published more quickly.

Some journals have theme issues, where all the articles published in a certain issue relate to the same topic. Journals that do this typically publish a list of upcoming themes periodically, along with dates by which the manuscripts must be submitted. If your topic fits a journal's theme, you may have a better chance of it getting accepted for publication, particularly if they have fewer submissions for theme issues than they might for general topic issues. It would be wise to keep abreast of upcoming theme issues in journals that publish in topic areas that match those to which you commonly write.

Purposes

Your purpose in writing for publication can influence your choice of journal to target. If you are seeking tenure or promotion in an academic setting, your institution may have guidelines about the type of journal to which most of your publications should be targeted. It is important to find out if this is the case so you can make an informed choice. Some areas that might be important are the impact factor, type of journal, number of subscribers, and the databases that list the journal.

The impact factor relates to the number of times that particular journal is cited in a set period (Johnstone, 2007). This factor is calculated by dividing the number of citations of articles published within a specified period by the number of articles published in the journal during the same specified period. Therefore, the greater the citations to the number of articles published, the higher the impact factor. If the journal is cited frequently, it means it is being read widely, and the information in the journal is being used to justify other work. A journal with a high impact factor may be seen as prestigious (Broome, 2007). However, there is controversy on the reliability of the impact factor (Ironstone, 2007 and Johnstone, 2007), that is, citations of a publication, such as a research article, do not always correlate with the value of the publication in research, practice, or education. Another issue that may influence the impact factor is self-

citation. When journals encourage or require citations from their recent publications, the impact factor may be skewed. However, a study by The Thomson Corporation noted that when adjusting the journals for self-citations, only 22 of 153 journals changed in ranking (The Thomson Corporation, 2004). Therefore, the impact factor is just one quantitative method for measuring the influence of an article on research, practice, and/or education.

Traditionally, we think of journals as those in print and available by full text via the Internet. However, Internet journals are also a venue for publication. Internet journals may be similar to print journals except they are only available on the internet or they may be open-access journals—a recent type of publication. An important issue with all Internet journals is whether the articles are permanently archived. This means that when an article is cited in a publication, a reader could access that article at any time. Open-access journals are defined as journals that allow free-of-charge access to articles either in open-access journals or by virtue of a Web site-based depository (Correia & Teixeira, 2005). These open-access journals are frequently peer reviewed and were begun as a response to the paradox of publicly funded research frequently being published in journals with high subscription costs, therefore limiting access of the research results to only those who have libraries that can afford subscriptions. Open-access journals are funded by means other than subscriptions, sometimes by charging authors to publish their manuscripts. Although gaining recognition and respect, some authors are reluctant to publish in these types of journals (Schroter, Tite, & Smith, 2005).

If the number of subscribers to a journal is high, that means your work will potentially be seen by more readers. Journals that are published by professional organizations, such as JOGNN, Journal of Nursing Scholarship, and Nursing Education Perspectives, are sent to all the members of their respective organizations as a member benefit, so they are easily accessible to readers at their home or by electronic mail. Similarly, if important databases, such as the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature list the journal, it is accessible to more people, which means your work may be seen and potentially used by others.

One of the most important features to note when assessing the credibility of publications is the review process. Journals that have a structured peer review process are considered more credible. Peer review means that your manuscript is sent to independent reviewers who are viewed as your peers. In nursing this is typically done by “blinding” the reviewer to the author(s) of the manuscript. This blinding process is to provide the most objective evaluation of the manuscript and to reduce bias in reviews (Kearney & Freda, 2005). Based on the reviewers' feedback and recommendations, the editor(s) make a publication decision.

Sometimes in preparation for grant submission or other professional activities, it is important to “make a name” for yourself in a certain area. This is done by publishing articles on a certain topic in journals that will be read by other important people in your field. In this case, you would want to examine journals to see where other leaders in the field typically publish and also be aware of the impact factor and the circulation of the journal. Another point to consider: Some journals have a high degree of interactivity. They seek commentaries from other nurses who have written in the same area and encourage comments from readers and letters to the editors. These commentaries and letters are published, and frequently, the author of the article is invited to respond. If you would like to engage in public dialogue with others of similar interest, these types of journals would be a place to publish.

If the purpose of your writing is to disseminate research results, other issues are important. When selecting a journal to submit research results, consider the research method(s) used. Although many journals publish both quantitative and qualitative research studies, many journals may be focused on one method. An example of a specific methodological journal is Qualitative Health Research. Further, a journal may primarily publish a specific methodology, such as only quantitative research. Although most journals denote a page limit for manuscript submissions, page limitations may be particularly important when reporting research results. For example, because qualitative data are dialectical, many qualitative study results may require more space to present the data compared to quantitative results. Further, journals may limit the number of tables or figures and a charge may also be assessed for pages and graphics. Therefore, examining the journal criteria for page length parameters, table or figure limitations, and costs associated with each are important.

Sample size may also be an important issue for some journals. Although no journals were found that denoted a minimum sample size, it would be important to examine studies published in the journal to determine the usual sample size accepted. For example, if all the studies have sample sizes greater than 200 in multiple issues of the journal, the authors may want to consider this in making a decision for submission. Some journals require that results of a power analysis be reported if inferential statistics are used (Instructions for Authors, 2007). A query to the editor regarding sample size expectations may be efficacious.

Other research methodologies, such as secondary analyses, metasyntheses, and mixed methods, may also present issues related to selecting a publication venue. Targeting a journal that has previously published studies using these methodologies may be important to facilitate time to

publication. Many journals provide a description of the type of journal submissions that are of interest. In addition, some journals have a call for specific articles or topics section that is published regularly. Reviewing descriptions and specific calls are important strategies when selecting the most appropriate journal for your research publication.

The results of your study may also influence the journal targeted. One form of publication bias is rejecting manuscripts of studies with negative or nonsignificant results (Soeken & Sripusanapan, 2003). In a study to examine publication bias related to editorial decision making (Olson et al., 2002), having multiple sites, United States enrollment, and sample size calculations, not findings, were significantly associated with publication.

Journal Guidelines

The journal guidelines also provide information that may affect your decision to target that journal. Most journals post author guidelines on the journal Web site. For example, some journals have electronic submission, and others use hard copy submission. Journals that have electronic submission also often collect and distribute data from reviewers electronically, which can shorten the queue time for review, acceptance, and possibly for publication. Therefore, if you prefer to communicate electronically, then this guideline would be important.

Journals vary in their style of writing and reference citation. Some journals require formal, scientific writing, whereas some allow or encourage a more conversational style. Your manuscript may lend itself more to one or the other of these styles. In addition, each journal uses a certain style manual format for references. If you are more familiar with one style of reference citation, you may prefer to submit your manuscript to a journal that uses this style.

Some journals permit and encourage numerous tables and figures, whereas other journals may limit these. If your manuscript requires tables or figures, pay close attention to the journal's author guidelines regarding number of tables/figures allowed, types of data allowed in tables/figures, and the relationship of what is reported in the text of the manuscript versus what is reported in the tables. In addition, if you are using figures or tables from another source, the journal may require written copyright permission from the original source. These factors may influence your decision in submitting your manuscript.

The number of authors on your manuscript is another consideration. Some journals limit the number of authors they will name. Some style formats, such as The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association(2001), share this limitation. In addition to number of authors, journal guidelines may also require detailed documentation of the contribution each author made to the manuscript. If you have multiple authors and feel strongly that all should be included, these requirements would be important to consider.

Summary

Table 1 is a checklist for you to visually rank the categories discussed in this article by importance when choosing a publication venue for your manuscript. This table does not result in a summative score that will automatically assist you in identifying the one best journal to target for your manuscript. However, Table 1 does help you to identify the areas that are most important to you prior to selecting a journal.

Table 1. Determining Publication Venue by Priority Ranking

Category	Very Important (3)	Somewhat Important (2)	Unimportant (1)
Audience			
Clinical			
Research			
Education			
Administration			
Consumers			
Other			
Topic			
Focus			
Timeliness			
Theme			
Purposes			
Academic/Tenure			

Category	Very Important (3)	Somewhat Important (2)	Unimportant (1)
Establishing a reputation for self			
Consumer focused			
Dissemination of research/information			
Journal Guidelines			
Type of submission			
Style			
Table/Figures			
Number of authors			

There are various comprehensive listings of published journals, such as the list found on <http://www.nurseauthoreditor.com/library.asp>. These lists may help expand your potential venues for publication. In fact, some Web sites have contact information for journal editors, as well as direct links to journal Web sites containing author guidelines. When choosing a publication venue, it is advisable to make yourself aware of the many journals available.

It is always a good practice to peruse several copies of a journal you are considering targeting before making your choice of publication venue. Look at the topics of their recently published articles, the typical article length, the tone of the language (formal vs. conversational), the presence or absence of commentaries, and any information about upcoming theme issues. None of these issues can be considered independently. Most often, multiple factors are considered simultaneously (see Table 1). Weighing the importance of each of these issues will assist you in choosing the most appropriate publication venue for your manuscript. In fact, choosing the right publication venue for your scholarly work may be as important as doing the work itself. By carefully considering all aspects of both your manuscript and potential journals, you can best target your work to make the biggest difference to nursing research, education, and practice.

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