

Letter to Editor: Advice for Academics About Writing for Publication



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Dear Editor

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ny research should finally be published. Although there are many books on writing from a scientific perspective, the readers may get confused because none of these books are perfect.

During his academic life, mostly teaching writing, the first author (AK) always desired to know more about writing and its key components. The turning point came when he and the second author (RW) were discussing a scientific project.

They maintained contact for several years, and one day, during their talk about writing, it was revealed that RW was the editor-in-chief of two journals in Nursing: Journal of Advanced Nursing and Nursing Open. They started to discuss good practices and effective strategies in academic writing. Their daily discussions continued over about two months, and finally, they arrived at several pieces of advice they would like to share.

Before you start

Always read the guidelines [1]. Most papers are rejected because authors simply miss to observe the journal guidelines.

Getting started

Before writing a scientific article, create a Word file containing the headings and sub-headings (usually given in the guidelines, or you can see them in a typical article in the journal) and put a page break (Ctrl+Enter) after each one. Then write the “Methods” section. Next, write the “Results” section and build the rest of the manuscript around these sections. Don’t start at the beginning of a manuscript and work to the end. While you are writing one section, if you have any idea for another section, note that too until you reach your target [2].

How to keep going

The author(s) should allocate enough time to write, and during this time, they should aim for a certain number of words to write down. Write a regular number of words each day (or each time you sit down to write) and count the words. Set a target, for example, 500 words each time you write, but the target can be fewer [3]. Check the word count at the foot of the page to see when the target is near. When you reach it, stop! If you have any ideas that you still want to write about, put them down as bullet points, and that is where you start writing the next time you open up the document.

Learn to write in a bad mood. That is, do not wait until you feel like writing. The best writers write even if they

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do not feel ready. Learn to write anywhere and do not look for a perfect place; planes, trains, and hotels are excellent places to write. Do not develop a habit of finding a favorite place to write because we are not always there and many colleagues will use being away from their office, e.g. at a conference, as an excuse for not writing. But they often take long journeys by train or plane and spend lots of time in a hotel room. So they should take their portable computers and use it to write. Most hotels and airports are equipped with internet free access. If this facility is not available, write the material that does not need the references or just write what you think and then check it later. The main task of a writer is to get words down on paper or a computer.

Just write and do not edit. Keep writing until you have a complete first draft and then revise and edit it. If you edit each line or sentence as you are writing, your progress will be plodding.

Keep a notebook and carry it. It is good to write down ideas when they come. If you do not have a notebook, use the notes section on your mobile phone. Write down the things that ‘buzz around’ in your head. Sometimes it is an idea about expressing something or adding something in the manuscript or anything else. It is surprising how often we come up with good ideas, but we simply forget them.

Write concisely

If you can reduce some words, then do it! Fewer is always better. For example, “in order to” can be replaced by “to”, “a number of” by “several”, “the majority of” by “most”, and “a period of time” by a “period”.

Seek help

Seek some criticism of your writing. In other words, ask someone to read your manuscript. S/he does not have to be an expert or a senior colleague. Any comment may be right and, therefore, helpful.

Never give up

Treat every rejection as the start of the next submission; in other words, never give up!

Keep practicing

Write other things than scientific papers, for instance, opinions, blogs [4], editorials, and for these all you need your ideas. Any kind of writing is good practice.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical implications of this work.

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Ahmad Reza Khatoonabadi and Roger Watson contributed equally to the manuscript

Conflict of interest

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