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Many nurses have thought about writing for a nursing publication, but most don’t follow through. Why? Most are simply unfamiliar with the writing process and feel intimidated about taking the first steps toward getting published. If that describes you, this article will help you get started.

**Take Down Two Common Roadblocks**

Many nurses hesitate to write because they believe only “nurse experts” in a field are qualified to publish. Not so. Some of the best content I’ve ever read in nursing publications was written by nurses in practice who care for patients every day. They’re not necessarily gurus in their field, but they have keen insights into patient care that would interest other nurses. Any nurse can write and be published, and others will benefit from his or her knowledge and experience. If we waited for only the most famous nurses in a field to write for us, we’d have very few nursing articles to read!

Another reason nurses don’t write is that they can’t decide on a topic – or they pick a topic that’s not appropriate for the publication they’ve chosen to write for. So let’s talk about topic development and finding a focus that fits the publication they’ve chosen to write for. For instance, if you want to write for a particular newsletter, take the time to look at three recent issues to get some ideas about appropriate content. Also look for information about the editor and how you can reach him or her. As you review the publications, think about the editor and how the readers’ needs are being met with the articles that are published. Also review the publication’s author guidelines (information on how to get the guidelines is usually available in the printed publication or on the publication’s or association’s Web site). With this background, you can start to develop a few ideas that might work in the newsletter.

Send the editor a “query letter” with one key idea or with a few of your favorite ideas for topics. Tell her you’re a first-time author if that’s the case; chances are, she’ll be willing to help you get started. Feedback from an editor will help you understand what the readers want to learn from your article. Combine your ideas with the editor’s know-how and viola! A good idea for your article emerges.

Be sure to work out a deadline with the editor. This shows your commitment to getting the work done. An editor’s involvement will improve your first attempt and increase your chances of being published. But remember, a positive response to a topic query is no guarantee that your article will be accepted or published. You still need to write well, meet deadlines, and deliver information that will interest readers.

Another good place to start your writing career is by writing for a publication’s “Letters to the Editor column.” Again, always review three recent issues, read the letters published, and read the articles that the letters refer to. Then consider writing a letter about an article that interests you and that you have something to say about, either pro or con. Develop a short, well-focused letter that’s only one or two paragraphs long. Show a little passion and energy in this type of writing and use facts to back up your comments, if appropriate.

**Tips for Writing Well**

Before you start to write, gather background information on your topic, read it, and re-read it. Learn more about the topic than you need to know for the article. This preparation helps you build knowledge about the topic and understand varied perspectives, which will give your writing more authority and depth. Be sure to clearly identify references when appropriate, using the style described in the author guidelines.

When you start writing, be clear and concise. Get to the point immediately. Weed out unnecessary words, long complicated sentences, flowery language, and repetitive information. Remember, editors read all day, and clear concise writing gets their attention. Which would you rather read – a verbose 12-page article on a topic, or one that covers the same information in 6 pages? Manuscripts that read like term papers are likely to end up in the reject bin.


So write to me at Cheryl.mee@wolterskluwer.com, or write to MedSurg Matters (fordc@ajj.com) with your topic ideas. We look forward to hearing from you!

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