

# How to get your article published

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**MANY OF US** have a secret desire to see our ideas in print—to be viewed as a thought leader or a recognized subject matter expert. So what stops us from pursuing that secret desire? It could be fear of rejection, inexperience, writer's block, lack of organizational support, or time constraints, to name a few.

After obtaining their degree or credentials, most nurses focus on honing their clinical skills, not on polishing their writing skills. Like nursing skills, writing well requires structure, practice, and dedication. This article provides tips on writing articles to help you realize your dream of becoming a published author.

## Steps in the writing process

Writing for publication entails several steps, which resemble those of the nursing process—assessment, nursing diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation. (See *Nursing process and writing process: Points of similarity*.)

**Step 1: Contemplation** (analogous to the assessment step of the nursing process). During this step, decide what you want to write about. What are your burning clinical questions? What do you have a passion for? Is the subject timely? Who's the target audience? Also contemplate the type of article you wish to write. For example, you could write a reflection piece, a best-practice piece, a research article, or a letter to the editor. Given the array of options, assess what feels right for you.

**Step 2: Gap analysis** (nursing diagnosis step). Search for articles on the topic you've chosen to write about to find out if a gap exists in the current literature. Also think about which journals cover your chosen topic and find their author guidelines (usually available on the journal's website). Author guidelines typically include information on the submission process, word limits, and policies about pictures and graphs.

**Step 3: Query submission** (planning step). Submit a query letter to the journal or journals you've chosen to gauge their interest in your topic. In a brief email, state your topic,

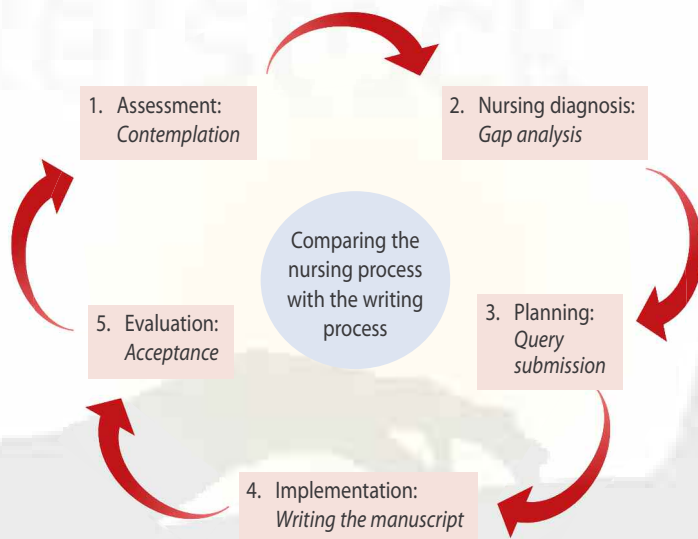
## Advice on choosing and researching a topic, contacting potential publishers, and putting fingertips to keyboard

summarize your background, and give your qualifications to write on this topic. Some call this a pitch letter because you're pitching your idea to the editor to gauge interest in the topic. Like the planning step of the nursing process, this letter articulates your goals and desired outcomes. Usually, you'll receive a timely response. The response might give you a deadline for submission—or it might guide you to move in a different direction.

**Step 4: Writing the manuscript** (implementation

## Nursing process and writing process: Points of similarity

The steps used to develop and write an article somewhat resemble the steps of the nursing process. In the flow diagram below, nursing process steps appear in regular font; writing process steps, in italics.



step). This is where the work gets done. Create dedicated time on your daily or weekly calendar to write your article. Preparing an outline and establishing deadlines are helpful motivators. If more than one author will contribute to the manuscript, assign sections to each one. Based on discussion and collaboration, have one person edit the document so it reads as though written in “one voice.” Once you write the first draft, set it aside for a few days; then revisit it with fresh eyes and make revisions. Consider asking a mentor with publishing experience to review your manuscript and provide feedback before you submit it.

**Step 5: Acceptance** (evaluation step). In the nursing process, the evaluation step requires you to determine if goals and expected outcomes have been met. In the acceptance step of the writing process, you find out if your manuscript has been accepted for publication. In many cases, acceptance comes with edits, suggestions, and queries you may need to answer to put the finishing touch on your article. Realize that being asked to revise is a good outcome.

On the other hand, you may learn your article wasn't accepted for publication. As in nursing care, your first intervention may not succeed—but as nurses, we don't give up. If your article isn't accepted, you can

send a query letter to another journal, along with your manuscript already prepared for submission.

### Tips for success

These additional suggestions can help you jump-start your writing career.

- Acknowledge your mentor or others who've helped you along the way. This will make them more willing to help you in the future.
- Use your own voice to help avoid plagiarism.
- To stay on track, dedicate time on your calendar for writing.
- Consider creating a writing support group with colleagues who share your desire to publish. Invite your writing mentor to support group meetings.
- Follow the steps of the writing process described above. By likening the steps of writing to the nursing process, you can improve your writing skills and achieve success in publication.

### Selected reference

Saver C. *Anatomy of Writing for Publication for Nurses*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Sigma Theta Tau International; 2014.

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