

From Practice to Publication:

Writing for Publication for Nurses

From your first letter to the editor to peer-reviewed research — a practical guide to finding your voice in nursing literature

🕒 Listen time: ~60 minutes • 👥 Audience: RNs, APRNs, nurse leaders, nursing faculty, all healthcare providers • 🎧 elitelearning.com/ce-podcast

Featured Voices

HOST	GUEST
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What You'll Learn

- Why only ~3% of nurses publish — and why that gap matters for the entire profession
- The three buckets of publishable writing: opinion pieces, feature articles, and data-based articles
- How to test whether your idea is strong enough for publication — four essential questions
- How to identify the right journal for your topic, including nursing and interprofessional options
- What author guidelines are, why they matter, and how ignoring them leads to desk rejection
- How to spot predatory journals — and the red flags that signal a publication is not legitimate
- The step-by-step writing process: from key message to outline to manuscript
- The most common mistakes that weaken manuscripts — and how to avoid them
- How to find a writing mentor, accountability partner, or coauthor
- What authorship, acknowledgment, permissions, and plagiarism mean in scholarly publishing
- How to protect patient privacy when writing about clinical experiences
- How to handle peer review feedback — including a practical four-color system for revisions
- Three practical first steps any nurse can take this week to begin writing

Key Takeaways

- **Nursing research is not complete until it is disseminated:** If knowledge stays on one unit, in one clinic, or one organization, it is effectively lost. Publishing is how nurses create lasting influence — across the country and around the globe.
- **Only ~3% of nurses publish — and that gap has consequences:** The Woodhull Study found that nurses are cited in only 2–4% of health news stories. The underrepresentation of nursing voices in the literature directly contributes to nurses being overlooked as experts. Publishing changes that.

- **You already have something worth publishing:** If you have explained a protocol, taught a patient, presented at a staff meeting, or completed a quality improvement project, you already have the expertise. Writing is simply capturing that knowledge on paper.
- **There are three buckets of publishable writing:** Opinion pieces (letters to the editor, viewpoints, reflection essays), feature articles (clinical topics, case studies, professional issues), and data-based articles (research, EBP, quality improvement). Every nurse has options.
- **Test your idea before you write:** Ask four questions — Who cares? Why now? Is it needed? So what? If your topic is timely, offers something new, and will change thinking or practice, it is likely publishable.
- **Choose your journal before you write, not after:** Start with journals you already read. Use the INANE Nursing Journals Directory for nursing journals and PubMed's catalog for interprofessional options. Download the information for authors and follow it exactly — word limits, formatting, and structure are non-negotiable.
- **Predatory journals are real — know the red flags:** Unsolicited emails, excessive flattery, vague journal names, promises of rapid acceptance, and requests to attach manuscripts to email are all warning signs. Legitimate journals use editorial manager systems and have verifiable published content.
- **Start with your key message:** Every manuscript needs a central thesis — your North Star. From there, build a simple outline with major headings and key points. Use reporting guidelines (EQUATOR Network, SQUIRE 2.0, CARE) for data-based articles.
- **Common manuscript mistakes are avoidable:** Poor organization, repetition, inadequate literature review, not following guidelines, and skipping feedback are the most frequent reasons manuscripts are weakened. Good writing is rewriting — it is never a one-and-done process.
- **Find a mentor — it is the single most important step:** A writing mentor can guide you through the information for authors, help you refine your outline, and support you through revision. Use your network, your librarian, your CNS, conferences, and professional organizations to find one.
- **Authorship has an international definition:** Per the ICMJE, authors must meet all three criteria: substantial contribution to conception/design/data, drafting and reviewing for intellectual content, and accountability for accuracy. Those who contribute but do not meet all criteria belong in the acknowledgments.
- **Patient privacy is non-negotiable:** Never include names, dates of birth, dates of care, addresses, or indirect identifiers. Case studies require non-identifiable, aggregate data. Many journals require written patient consent for case reports. Check your organization's policies before submitting.
- **Rejection is part of the process — not the end:** Even experienced authors receive major revisions. Use a four-color highlighter system to categorize feedback: easy fixes, substantive changes, contradictory comments, and items you disagree with. You do not have to accept every reviewer suggestion — but you must explain your rationale.
- **Writing for publication is a marathon, not a sprint:** Write 30–60 minutes at a time, 2–3 times per week. Start anywhere — not necessarily the introduction. Get a rough draft on paper first, then seek feedback. Ask your organization for protected professional development time.

Do This Next

- ☐ Start a writing journal this week. Write down your curiosities, areas of expertise, projects you have been involved in, and clinical experiences that stand out. Over time, themes and potential article ideas will emerge.
- ☐ Practice writing every day — not just when you sit down to write an article. Write emails in full sentences. Craft thoughtful LinkedIn or Facebook posts. Volunteer to write a piece for your hospital newsletter, nursing newsletter, or local newspaper.
- ☐ Put your best idea through the four tests: Who cares? Why now? Is it needed? So what? If it passes, you have a publishable topic.
- ☐ Identify which of the three buckets fits your idea — opinion piece, feature article, or data-based article — and look up two or three journals that publish that type of content.

- ☐ Go to the INANE Nursing Journals Directory (Google: 'Nursing Journals Directory') and explore journals in your specialty. Download the information for authors for your top choice.
- ☐ Search PubMed's journal catalog for interprofessional journals that might reach a broader audience for your topic.
- ☐ Identify one published nurse author in your network — through your manager, librarian, CNS, or professional organization — and reach out to ask about mentorship or accountability partnership.
- ☐ If you are writing a data-based article, visit the EQUATOR Network and download the appropriate reporting guideline (SQUIRE 2.0 for EBP/QI, CARE for case studies, CONSORT for RCTs).
- ☐ Before submitting any manuscript, get feedback from at least three people: a colleague with expertise in your topic, a colleague unfamiliar with your topic, and a non-nurse friend or family member.
- ☐ Ask your organization: 'Is there protected time available for professional development or writing? Can I request time to work on a manuscript?'
- ☐ Reflect on Dr. Halm's closing challenge: You already have something worth publishing. What is the one topic, project, or experience you keep coming back to — and what would it take to get it on paper?

? 3 Quick Publication Readiness Questions

Use these to reflect on your own readiness — or to open a conversation with a nurse considering writing for publication:

- 1. Idea check:** "Do I have a clinical experience, project, quality improvement initiative, or area of expertise that I have not seen well-represented in the nursing literature — and that other nurses would benefit from reading about?"
- 2. Barrier check:** "What is the one thing that has stopped me from writing for publication so far — time, confidence, not knowing where to start, or fear of rejection? What would it take to address that barrier this month?"
- 3. Network check:** "Do I know at least one published nurse author I could reach out to for mentorship or guidance? If not, where in my professional network — my organization, my specialty association, or a conference — could I find one?"

► Red Flags & Cautions

- Skipping author guidelines: Not following word limits, formatting, or required sections can lead to desk rejection.
- Submitting to a questionable journal: Be cautious of unsolicited invitations, rapid-publication promises, and journals with unclear editorial or indexing information.
- Submitting to multiple journals at once: A manuscript should be submitted to only one journal at a time.
- Incorrect authorship or acknowledgments: List only those who meet authorship criteria, and appropriately acknowledge other meaningful contributions.
- Compromising patient privacy: Remove identifying information and obtain consent when required for case reports, images, or other identifiable material.
- Reusing copyrighted material without permission: Online availability does not automatically mean a figure, table, image, or text can be reused.
- Ignoring peer-review feedback: Reviewer comments can strengthen a manuscript and should be carefully considered before resubmitting elsewhere.
- Giving up after rejection: Rejection is common and does not necessarily mean the work is not publishable.
- Writing without support: Mentors, coauthors, or accountability partners can make the process more manageable.
- Waiting for the “perfect” time or idea: Start with a clear message and build the manuscript in manageable writing sessions.

Publication Spotlight

★ **Three Types of Publishable Nursing Writing:** Nursing publications generally fall into three broad categories. **Opinion pieces** include letters to the editor, viewpoints, and reflection essays that allow nurses to share perspectives, respond to published work, or advocate for change. **Feature articles** explore clinical topics, case studies, and professional issues in greater depth. **Data-based articles** report research, evidence-based practice, or quality improvement projects and typically require use of established reporting guidelines.

★ **INANE Nursing Journals Directory:** The International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) maintains a directory of nursing journals that includes journal websites, editors, scope, aims, and submission information. It is a useful starting point for identifying journals that may be a good fit for a manuscript. Nurses may also use PubMed and the National Library of Medicine catalog to explore interprofessional or specialty journals outside of nursing.

★ **EQUATOR Network Reporting Guidelines:** The EQUATOR Network provides established reporting guidelines for health research and scholarly projects. Examples include **SQUIRE 2.0** for quality improvement, **CONSORT** for randomized controlled trials, and **CARE** for case reports. Using the appropriate guideline early can help organize the manuscript and ensure that important information is included.

★ **Why Nursing Voices Matter:** The Woodhull studies found that nurses remain underrepresented as sources in health news coverage despite making up a large portion of the healthcare workforce. Increasing nurses' participation in publication and other forms of professional communication can help make nursing expertise more visible and strengthen the profession's influence on healthcare discussions.

Conversation Starter

"Think about the clinical experience, project, or area of expertise you keep coming back to — the one you have told colleagues about, the one that changed how you practice, or the one you wish someone had written about before you encountered it. What would it mean for your patients, your colleagues, and the profession if that knowledge existed in the literature? What is the one barrier standing between you and writing it — and what would it take to remove it this month?"

Nurse Leaders & Educators: Consider hosting a unit or faculty conversation around: "How many nurses on our team have published — or have something worth publishing? What would it look like to build a writing culture here, where nurses are supported to share their expertise with the broader profession?" Use the responses to identify potential mentors, writing groups, and organizational support structures.

Resources & Links

• INANE Nursing Journals Directory: nursingeditors.com • EQUATOR Network (reporting guidelines): equator-network.org • American Journal of Nursing: journals.lww.com/ajnonline • Critical Care Nurse Journal: ccnonline.org • American Journal of Critical Care: aacnjournals.org/ajcconline • PubMed Journal Catalog (NLM): ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nlmcatalog	• Episode page: elitelearning.com/ce-podcasts • Apple Podcasts • Spotify • ICMJE Authorship Criteria: icmje.org • CE courses: EliteLearning.com • YouTube • EliteLearning.com • American Nurse Journal Podcast: Write, Submit and Succeed
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