

What Reviewers Say: Authors, Listen Up!

The Editors of the *Journal of Nursing Education* (JNE) have frequently used Editorials as a means of helping authors write for the *Journal*. For example, more than a decade ago, Bellack (2003) offered specific information about how to get published in JNE; she followed up in 2010 with a list of 10 very specific practices authors should embrace before submitting an article. Morin (2014) again addressed what authors should consider when submitting to JNE. Recognizing the increasing demand for doctoral students to publish, Reising and Morin (2015) most recently provided guidance for both students and faculty. Obviously, helping authors be successful in their writing efforts is of importance to the *Journal*.

Recently, the editors asked JNE's editorial board members and panel of peer reviewers to share their top three pet peeves and their three key pieces of advice to help authors to be successful in their publication efforts. This request was predicated on the fact that reviewers are experts in the field of nursing education, spend considerable time and effort providing thoughtful reviews, and are committed to helping authors be successful. So what did they say?

Pet Peeves

Pet Peeve No. 1: Lack of Conceptual Congruency

This pet peeve, lack of conceptual congruency, is the most concerning and one which authors must heed. One reviewer commented, "Lack of coherence between the background, methods, results, and discussion/conclusions section...[such as when] the background

information provided doesn't lead the reader naturally to the methods section." For example, lack of congruency is present when a theoretical framework is introduced but not incorporated into the discussion of the findings.

Reviewers mentioned other pet peeves, such as introducing new concepts or terms without defining them when they are first introduced, leaving the reviewer to wonder what the author meant. Often, author familiarity with terms prevents him or her from seeing this issue. Keeping one reviewer's statement, "Use clear language," in the forefront may help address this issue.

Another issue is not making the case for the importance of the study (e.g., providing a cogent and coherent review of literature) through logical linkages of key concepts. As one reviewer commented, avoid making "grandiose claims or absolutes with no substance to support the claim," as doing so can result in a reviewer questioning the credibility of the manuscript. Finally, a reviewer offered, "Keep your purpose in mind and make sure you address the purpose in every section to keep the manuscript aligned."

Pet Peeve No. 2: Poorly Written Manuscripts

Reviewers were emphatic about how frustrating it is to read poorly written manuscripts replete with grammar, syntax, and spelling errors. Yes, JNE does receive such manuscripts! Poorly written manuscripts typically indicate a work that may have been undertaken in haste or reflect an author's lack of attention and care, which, in turn, causes reviewers to question the author's credibility

or veracity. Manuscripts that are poorly organized in presenting ideas and lack poor logical flow, as well as those that are not clear and concise in conveying what needs to be conveyed, are also pet peeves. One reviewer commented, "Too many [authors] seem to think that complex sentences and abstract or esoteric language sounds scholarly, and it doesn't. It just sounds like someone who doesn't know what he or she is writing." Reviewers are adept at assessing whether authors really have a command of the topic being addressed.

Another characteristic reviewers mentioned is the poor articulation of the research process used. In other words, not enough information is provided to enable the reader to understand the method or to reproduce the study. This concern, particularly relevant for reports of research and literature reviews, should be kept in mind when submitting a major article or research briefs. Moreover, if a novel approach or statistical analysis has been done, additional information should be provided so the reviewer has a full understanding of it.

Pet Peeve No. 3: Limited Review of the Literature

Reviewers consistently highlighted the lack of a well-conducted and well-presented literature review. One reviewer commented that lack of familiarity with the literature contributed to a lack of innovation. In other words, not being familiar with the literature limited the advance of the science of nursing education. Frequently, this section of a manuscript reads as though written as an undergraduate or graduate course assignment. In ad-

dition, authors do not include literature from other disciplines, limiting the comprehensive perspective and the extension of thinking about the topic that are an important part of a literature review.

Key Advice

Not surprisingly, much of the advice offered by the editorial board members and peer reviewers addressed how authors can avoid the pet peeves outlined above. Highlighted below is additional advice that authors will find helpful.

Key Advice No. 1: Offer Something Original and Important

Reviewers want to read work that “moves nursing education forward and addresses pressing issues in the teaching of nursing.” For authors to meet this charge, they should be “very familiar with the current literature and current practices.” Sometimes, being familiar will require immersing oneself in dated literature, as it is possible that what is being presented was addressed more than 5 years ago. Expanding on this piece of advice, one reviewer stated, “Consider that sometimes it is better to have a new spin or perspective on a highly published hot topic than write on a topic for which there is little published because there is little interest.”

Key Advice No. 2: Peer Review Prior to Submission

Repeatedly, reviewers advised authors to have a colleague review the manuscript prior to submission. Not only should the colleague review for substance, he or she should also review for logical flow, clarity, grammar, and spelling. As one reviewer offered:

Have someone totally unfamiliar with the topic read your manuscript and give you feedback on what’s not clear, what assumptions you seem to be making about what the reader already knows, how well you transition from one idea to the next, how consistent you are in the terms used, [and] how much jargon you’ve used.

Another reviewer stressed that authors should not rely on reviewers to edit or correct for grammar and spelling. Yet another said, “Do your work. We want to read what you have to say, not teach you how to write.” Others suggested hiring a professional editor. Review by an objective colleague or reader prior to submission helps to determine whether the manuscript, including discussion and conclusions, matches the purpose stated at the beginning of the manuscript.

Key Advice No. 3: Employ Tried and True Writing Strategies

Reviewers suggested strategies such as reading the manuscript aloud, as that technique “slows down your proofreading and you actually read what you wrote and not substitute what you meant to write for what is there when reading silently.” Certainly, reading and following manuscript submission guidelines is critical, and failure to do so was mentioned as a pet peeve by numerous reviewers. When multiple authors are involved, reviewers suggested that one author assume responsibility for assuring the manuscript reads as “one voice.” Another strategy is to review at least JNE’s publications in the previous year; doing so provides information regarding structuring of the manuscript, as well as currency of the topic. Use of an

outline and headings can enhance flow of the manuscript and highlight any gaps in information.

Conclusion

What does the preceding mean to potential authors? Of note, much of what the editorial board members and reviewers said has been highlighted in previous editorials and in other articles and textbooks. What is so interesting is that the same issues continue to surface. Authors are encouraged to review the pet peeves and words of advice carefully and ask themselves how well they address them when preparing manuscripts. Doing so can enhance publication success, not only in JNE but also in other publications. More importantly, doing so can enhance contributions made to the science of nursing education.

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