Editorial

Get Ready, Get Set, Write: Reprise

The commitment of nurse educators to disseminate and share their work and ideas with the broader nursing education community continues to be reflected in the growing number of manuscripts received each year. Over the past decade, the Journal of Nursing Education (JNE) has seen a 65% increase in the number of manuscript submissions. While JNE’s selectivity over the past decade has remained relatively steady, with approximately one of every five manuscripts accepted for publication, the higher volume of accepted manuscripts means we are publishing more articles each year. In response, we have expanded the number of pages in many issues to accommodate this growth and ensure that accepted manuscripts get to online posting and print in the most timely way possible.

The editors and editorial staff are honored that JNE is viewed by nurse educators as a prime venue for publishing their work, whether evidence-based research, teaching–learning innovations, quality improvement projects, or teaching tips. We want authors to be successful, and to that end, we have shared ideas and guidelines in several editorials over the past 15 years to help ensure their success (Bellack, 2003, 2010; Morin, 2014, 2017; Reising & Morin, 2015). Despite the availability of these helpful resources, the reasons many manuscripts are not accepted have remained largely the same over the years. So once again, at the start of this new year, I offer 10 guidelines below to help potential authors increase the likelihood their manuscript will not only be considered, but sent to our reviewers for peer review, ultimately accepted, and, most importantly, contribute to advancing the science of nursing education.

Before submitting your manuscript, review JNE’s website to determine whether your topic is a good fit with the journal’s purpose and scope (https://www.healio.com/nursing/journals/jne). A manuscript whose topic is outside the journal’s focus is the number one reason for rejection without peer review. JNE is devoted to publishing articles on various aspects of nursing education related to prelicensure and graduate nursing programs, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching–learning innovations, faculty and student issues, nursing education research, educational policy, academic leadership, and interprofessional education. Manuscripts on staff development, continuing education, patient education, and clinical care belong in other journals.

Next, make sure your manuscript fits the appropriate manuscript category, as outlined on the journal’s website (https://www.healio.com/nursing/journals/jne/submit-an-article). For example, if your research study is limited to a single institution with a small sample size, it does not warrant the category of a Major Article. Rather, you should follow the guidelines for a Research Brief. A manuscript that does not adhere to the guidelines will typically be rejected or you will be asked to revise the manuscript to fit the appropriate category. This delays the review process and, if eventually accepted, the time to publication. Because of the volume of submissions and, in turn, the number of articles accepted each year, JNE’s space is at a premium. Therefore, it is also important that your manuscript not exceed the guidelines for manuscript length. A 25-page manuscript containing six tables will be returned without review or for revision prior to peer review.

Before you begin to write, take the necessary time to familiarize yourself with the nursing education literature published on your topic within the past few years. We are looking for manuscripts that cover new ground, offer innovative or novel approaches, and expand on what is already available in the published literature. Manuscripts that fail to offer meaningful new contributions are not likely to be considered.

Organize, organize, organize! State your purpose clearly, develop a logical argument, and base conclusions on evidence you have provided or cited. Ensure your manuscript is clear, concise, flows well, and engages attention. Manuscripts that are disjointed and difficult to follow will lose reviewers’ interest. It is well worthwhile to have one or more colleagues who are unfamiliar with your work read the manuscript for clarity and coherence prior to submission. Poor writing and organization can make an otherwise worthy idea unacceptable. Also, be meticulous about adhering to the required American Psychological Association (APA) style, including spacing and citation formats, spelling, grammar, and writing style. Again, careful reading and editing—several times—is essential, as spelling and grammar detection software do not always pick up errors. Crisp, error-free presentation of your manuscript makes a positive impact on reviewers.

Be selective when including tables and figures. They should amplify and clarify your narrative, not duplicate it. They also
can be used to add information in a more concise format, provided the information enhances the narrative in a useful and meaningful way. A URL is often preferable to a lengthy table or complicated figure.

Use original sources and the most recent references to support your ideas. A majority or more should have been published within the past 5 years, unless they are classic and a necessary foundation for an understanding of your manuscript topic. Avoid citations drawn from the Internet unless the source material is unavailable elsewhere.

When writing about educational innovations and quality improvement projects, avoid describing details that are specific to your institution or common processes likely to be familiar to readers, such as how you formed a task force or steps of a curriculum review unless they are novel. Include only information and lessons learned that have relevance and applicability for other institutions or settings. Conversely, be sure to include enough information to allow readers to replicate the innovation or project.

When writing integrative reviews, and indeed the review of literature within a manuscript, synthesize rather than annotate prior studies or works, tying together commonalities and differences. Also, such reviews should offer interpretations and applications of the source material to your own work.

Offer a reasoned and objective treatment of your subject, rather than a biased “mind already made up” viewpoint that fails to consider other perspectives or explanations. Also, make sure that any conclusions you draw are based on and supported by the evidence. Avoid making inferential leaps, however plausible they may sound.

Go beyond describing self-reported satisfaction or perceptions as the sole measure of success or impact of an innovation or intervention. To better advance nursing education’s body of knowledge, your manuscript should provide evidence of the impact of an educational innovation or research intervention on learning outcomes or performance behaviors or, in the case of qualitative work, offer an evidence-based analysis of common themes. Such manuscripts will be favored over those that include only indirect impact measures. Further, manuscripts that report the results of single pretest–posttest studies will rarely be considered, as they typically fail to contribute substantial new knowledge to the field.

Last year, Morin (2017) reported the top three pet peeves of JNE’s editorial board and peer review panel members when reviewing manuscripts. These include lack of conceptual congruency and coherence among the various sections of the manuscript; poorly written manuscripts, including poor organization, grammar, syntax, and spelling errors, and esoteric language; and limited review of or lack of familiarity with supporting literature.

Avoiding these pitfalls, following the guidelines outlined above, and attending carefully and closely to preparing your manuscript for submission will not guarantee that your manuscript will be accepted and published, but it will ensure your worthwhile ideas and works receive full and fair consideration. Now, get ready, get set, write!

References

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