

Preparing Research Manuscripts for Publication: A Guide for Authors

Ben Berkey, BS, and Susan Moore, RN, MSN, ANP, AOCN®

The publication of peer-reviewed research articles is a hallmark of nurse leadership. Research is the foundation of evidence-based practice (EBP), a rigorous methodology defined by Sackett, Strauss, Richardson, Rosenberg, and Haynes (2000) as integration of the best research, clinical expertise, and patient values. The process of EBP ensures that nurses and other healthcare team members use methodologically and statistically sound research to produce guidelines or recommendations for treatment and patient-care decisions (Doorenbos et al., 2008). By ensuring that research used for clinical decision making is valid and accurately reported, healthcare teams can put recommendations into practice with confidence. An interesting research project or unique concept is not enough to guarantee that a manuscript will be accepted for peer review or recommended by the peer reviewers for publication. Publication depends on solid methodology, accurate references, potentially reproducible statistical outcomes, and conclusions drawn from the research.

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) has supported the publication of oncology nursing research for 40 years in the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)*, the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)*, and Putting Evidence Into Practice (PEP) resources as reported in *CJON*, textbooks, and electronic formats. The missions and foci of *ONF* and *CJON* are different; *ONF* strives to publish nursing research with findings applicable to oncology nursing practice, whereas *CJON* focuses on articles of clinical interest. However, the publication process is similar for the two journals. The core aspects of peer-reviewed literature remain unchanged, but evolving publication styles have altered the way manuscripts are written and prepared for print. This article will address issues related to the

publication of nursing research and manuscript preparation and provide tips for authors preparing articles for submission to peer-reviewed journals. Although this article is targeted toward *ONF*, many of the guidelines presented also are applicable to *CJON* and other scholarly publications.

Review Process

Peer review may seem to be the end of the submission process, but authors should know what is expected during and beyond that stage so that manuscripts, as submitted, are as accurate and complete as possible to ensure a timely and appropriate review. Editors and reviewers want every manuscript to have the best opportunity for a favorable review and publication.

Editorial Review

When a manuscript is uploaded into the *ONF* electronic manuscript system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/onf>), the editor is alerted that the manuscript is ready for consideration for peer review. At that point, the editor reads the manuscript, including supporting materials such as the cover letter, in its entirety for quality, relevance, and scientific interest, and reviews the credentials of the author(s). An obvious mismatch (e.g., a statistically complex manuscript by a single author without an advanced degree) might prompt a database search for other publications by that author or a query to the author to provide more detail on how the study was conducted. On the editor's determination that the manuscript is publishable, meets the formatting requirements, and fills the current publishing needs of the journal, three peer reviewers are invited to evaluate the manuscript. To prevent biased reviews, identifying author infor-

mation is removed from the manuscript (double-blinding) by an ONS editorial assistant before the manuscript is made available to reviewers. Review generally takes three to four weeks. When all reviews are complete, the editor reads each review, notes any additional areas for improvement, and decides whether to accept the manuscript pending revisions, require a revision and second review, or reject the manuscript. A decision usually is reached within eight weeks, and the author is notified by e-mail. Accepting a manuscript without any revision is rare; 52% of manuscripts are ultimately accepted for publication in *ONF* (ONS, n.d.).

Copyediting

Once a manuscript has been accepted for publication, the editor reviews it again and notes any additional queries for the author. Next, an ONS copy editor or staff editor receives the manuscript for editing. During this process, references are checked for accuracy and formatting, the text is edited for grammar and clarity, and the article proof is prepared for the author's review. At this stage, prompt resolution of remaining queries by the author is critical, and deadlines must be respected to ensure that the article goes to print on schedule. Tips for avoiding common errors that result in queries to the author are presented in Figure 1.

Manuscript Preparation

Presenting research: Not all research results should be published. Authors should be realistic in assessing what they have written. The manuscript as submitted for academic review may not be ready for publication without major revision. The recent surge in doctor of nursing practice (DNP) programs has

General

- List credentials (e.g., RN, PhD) for all authors, as well as for anyone mentioned in an acknowledgment.
- Use the most current versions of demographic statistics, such as those provided by the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org/Research/CancerFactsFigures/index).
- Identify organizations granting institutional review board approval for the study.
- When using percentages to describe a sample, state the total N. In addition, include accompanying n value for each percentage whenever possible.
- Web pages periodically change addresses or are deleted; therefore, check all hyperlinks in a manuscript before submitting for review.

Reference Lists

- Ensure that all entries in the reference list are cited in the text.
- Include a digital object identifier (DOI) for articles and books, when available. CrossRef (www.crossref.org) has search functions for obtaining and verifying DOIs.
- When a reference has seven authors or less, list all.
- When a reference has eight or more authors, list the first six authors' names, followed by an ellipsis (" . . ."), then the last author's name. For an example, see Doorenbos et al. (2008) in the reference list of this article.

In-Text Citations

- Ensure that all in-text citations appear in the reference list at the end of the article.
- If a reference has five authors or less, list all authors on the first mention. The first author's name followed by "et al." and the publication year may be used for all subsequent citations.
- If a reference has six authors or more, the first author's name followed by "et al." is acceptable for all citations.
- When citing multiple references with the same first author and year of publication, list as many author names as is needed to differentiate the two. Example: Smith, Jones, et al., 2012; Smith, White, et al., 2012.
- If two different references have the same authors, distinguish them by publication year. If the years also are the same, denote the references as a, b, c, etc., according to alphabetical order by title. Example: Smith et al., 2012a, 2012b.
- When quoting a source verbatim, use quotation marks and include the page number of the quote after the in-text citation.

Tables and Figures

- Include appropriate citations for works based on another source, and document permission to reprint or adapt from the copyright holder for all reproductions. For more information, see American Psychological Association (2009).
- Avoid repeating information from tables and figures in the text. If one format works better, consider deleting the other.
- Provide the total N in demographic tables, and account for any missing data.
- Include accompanying n values for any percentages listed, and check all calculations. Percentages may be omitted for studies with small sample sizes ($N < 100$).

Figure 1. Tips for Preparing Manuscripts for Oncology Nursing Society Journals

Note. Based on information from Amen et al., 2005; American Psychological Association, 2009.

resulted in an increase in submissions of literature reviews prepared as capstone projects for the DNP degree, as indicated by cover letters and inquiries to ONF. Although literature reviews often represent the initial stage of the research process, space limitations may preclude consideration of a literature review that is not a meta-analysis or comprehensive data synthesis with strong implications for additional nursing research.

Manuscript length is always a consideration, even in online exclusive articles. Tools and other resources that are available freely online should be referenced via a Web link rather than reproduced. In addition, the editor may suggest that authors make nonessential figures, tables, or data available to readers by request, rather than including those data in the article. ONF also publishes research briefs (e.g., short articles) that may be more appropriate for research in progress.

Figures and tables: Presenting results in figures and tables is effective for showing findings in a quick and visually interesting way. However, authors should take care to avoid redundant information in tables, figures, and the text. The text may highlight key findings presented in tables, but should not repeat all data.

Any figure, table, or illustration that previously appeared in a book, journal, Web site, or any other publication will require written permission to reprint from the copyright holder, who often is the publisher, not the author. Authors are responsible for acquiring necessary permissions and paying any related fees. Reproducing a table, figure, or illustration from another publication without obtaining proper permission is a form of plagiarism. Simply crediting the original source is not sufficient in that case. Likewise, a figure or table that has been adapted (i.e., minor formatting or content edits) from another source also will require written permission to adapt from the copyright holder. However, if an author designs an original figure or table that only

draws from information stated in a previous article, citing the original source is sufficient. If an author is unsure whether to seek permission, he or she should contact the editor or publications staff for clarification. For more information about determining when to seek permission, see American Psychological Association ([APA], 2009).

Finally, ensure that the design of tables, flow charts, and study schemas will be readily understandable to readers. As stated by APA (2009), tables and figures "should be integral to the text but should be designed so that they can be understood in isolation" (p. 128). Researchers may find it difficult to distance themselves from a theoretical model they have pondered at length, but what makes sense to the author may not be easy for readers to comprehend. Authors should consider asking a colleague who is unfamiliar with their work for feedback on the design of figures and tables prior to manuscript submission. The editor or copy editor may suggest changes for clarity during the revision and proofing stages.

Submissions From Non-English-Speaking Authors

Oncology nursing research spans the world, and ONS supports multiple areas of outreach to foster reciprocal relationships with nurses and authors from non-English-speaking areas. Many of those countries have emerged as growth areas where increasing numbers of researchers and academics are challenged to write and submit manuscripts in English. Although the research methodology and statistics often are flawless, the manuscripts may be impaired by syntax and spelling errors, awkward phrasing, and use of terminology unfamiliar to ONS readers. Authors are advised to seek the services of an English-speaking nurse researcher or editor to review and edit the manuscript to ensure clarity before submission.

American Psychological Association Style

www.apastyle.org/index.aspx

- Provides information about reference and manuscript formatting, statistics, and grammar and usage

Oncology Nursing Forum Author Information

www.ons.org/Publications/ONF/AuthorInfo

- Includes submission guidelines specific to publishing requirements for the *Oncology Nursing Forum*

Purdue Online Writing Lab

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

- Offers free tutorials on writing, research, style, and English as a second language

Figure 2. Online Resources for Authors

Importance of Accurate Referencing

Amen, King, and Rieger (2005) provided a broad overview on correct referencing, noting that inaccurate referencing damages an author's reputation, frustrates readers, and perpetuates referencing errors in future publications. Although the reference list appears at the end of the published article, selecting references begins the process of research by allowing the author to determine what has been published in the past and providing direction for the current study. References are the foundation of the research study and must be accurate and current to provide solid footing moving forward. A long reference list does not necessarily mean the topic has been researched more thoroughly; only a concise but thorough list is needed. Often, authors may publish results from the same study in multiple journals. In that case, using the most recent and comprehensive reference is preferable to listing every journal in

which the work appeared. Nurse scientists who contribute to *ONF* and *CJON* must carefully assess any prior research on which they base their current work to avoid situations that would put their findings in jeopardy (Moore, 2011).

At ONS, the copy and staff editors verify all references in each article. That process becomes difficult when incomplete author names, article titles, and journal information are provided, necessitating a query to the author. *ONF* and *CJON* follow the reference style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.) (APA, 2009). Amen et al. (2005) provided many examples of common errors in references and citations. Tips for reference formatting specific to the most current edition of APA style are presented in Figure 1.

Conclusion

Writing research articles is a rewarding process and a necessary role of oncology nursing leadership. Potential and experienced authors alike should not hesitate to contact journal editors or publications staff directly to learn about submission requirements or request additional information. Many online resources also are available for authors (see Figure 2).

Journals such as *ONF* and *CJON* depend on the submissions of authors to enrich the oncology nursing literature with current, high-quality research. The editorial boards and publications staff at ONS are committed to providing authors with the resources and guidance they need to see their manuscripts become published articles. The authors of this article hope that these guidelines will ensure a smoother publication process for novice and experienced researchers alike.

The authors gratefully acknowledge Leslie McGee, BA, Sean Pleszak, BA, and Amanda Baker, BS, for their contributions to this article.

Ben Berkey, BS, is a copy editor in the Publications Department at the Oncology Nursing Society in Pittsburgh, PA; and Susan Moore, RN, MSN, ANP, AOCN®, is an oncology nurse practitioner and consultant in Chicago, IL. No financial relationships to disclose. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Oncology Nursing Society. Berkey can be reached at bberkey@ons.org, with copy to editor at ONFEditor@ons.org.

Digital Object Identifier:10.1188/12.ONF.433-435

References

- Amen, K., King, C.R., & Rieger, P.T. (2005). The bane of accurate referencing: How to achieve "perfection." *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 32, 734–736. doi:10.1188/05.ONF.734-736
- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Doorenbos, A.Z., Berger, A.M., Brohard-Holbert, C., Eaton, L., Kozachik, S., LoBiondo-Wood, G., . . . Varricchio, C. (2008). Oncology Nursing Society Putting Evidence Into Practice resources: Where are we now and what is next? *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 12, 965–970. doi:10.1188/08.CJON.965-970
- Moore, S. (2011). Can we trust your data? [Editorial]. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 39, 615. doi:10.1188/11.ONF.615
- Oncology Nursing Society. (n.d.). *Oncology Nursing Forum journal information*. Retrieved from <http://www.ons.org/Publications/ONF/About>
- Sackett, D.L., Strauss, S.E., Richardson, W.S., Rosenberg, W., & Haynes, R.B. (2000). *Evidence-based medicine: How to practice and teach EBM* (2nd ed.). London, England: Churchill-Livingstone.

Leadership & Professional Development

This feature provides a platform for oncology nurses to illustrate the many ways that leadership may be realized and professional practice may transform cancer care. Possible submissions include, but are not limited to, overviews of projects, accounts of the application of leader-

ship principles or theories to practice, and interviews with nurse leaders. Descriptions of activities, projects, or action plans that are ongoing or completed are welcome. Manuscripts should clearly link the content to the impact on cancer care. Manuscripts should be six to eight double-spaced

pages, exclusive of references and tables, and accompanied by a cover letter requesting consideration for this feature. For more information, contact Associate Editor Judy A. Schreiber, RN, PhD, at judy.schreiber@louisville.edu or Cindy Rishel, PhD, RN, OCN®, at rishelmom@gmail.com.