

Writing for Publication: 10 Steps to Success

Tanya Gregory, PhD
Editor, *JAAPA—Journal of the
American Academy of Physician
Assistants*



Step 1

Choose your topic well



Four questions on the reader's mind

1. Why is this article being published?
2. Why is it being published now?
3. What does it have to say to me?
4. Will it be worth my time to read it?



What makes a good topic?

- Relevance to today's practice (PAs need to know)
- Immediacy (PAs need to know right now)
- Impact (it will change what they do)
- Teaching value (there is a knowledge gap)



Think about...

- What's current
- What's challenging
- What's changing
- What's puzzling
- What's controversial
- What's **hot**



Draw upon...

- Your knowledge
- Your skills
- Your experience
- Your interests
- Your passions
- Your colleagues



Focus the topic

- ADHD
- ADHD in adults
- Treatment of ADHD in adults
- Drug treatment of ADHD in adults
- Cardiovascular risks of drug treatment of ADHD in adults



Tip for success

- Your article should be useful, interesting, or enjoyable to read
- It needs to be only one of the three
- If it is none of the three, no one will want to read it



A special case

What if you're a student?



Tips for success

- Choose a department, not a feature
- Write out of your experience
- Remember the teachable moment that worked for you as a student, and share it with your audience



This means....

- Don't write a clinical review article
- If you want to write a feature-length article, consider a Case Report
- Or, choose a case-based department, such as Case of the Month or Derm Digest



Or....

If you were asked to pose a clinical question and then research the literature to answer it ...

consider reworking your paper into a CAT Clinic



Finally....

Remember that whatever you wrote as a student will have to be revised and reworked to fit the journal's guidelines and requirements



Step 2

Research your target publication



Tip for success

Look at recent issues of the journal you want to write for



- Notice the types of articles that appear
- Don't just skim—read some of the articles, especially if you aren't a regular reader of the publication



Try to write your article so it fits the parameters of what that journal typically publishes



Notice the tone and style

- Is it conversational—an author speaking directly to the reader with the use of first and second person?
- Is it formal and academic?
- Somewhere in between?



When you write, try to imitate the same tone and style



Notice the length of articles



Make your article about as long, or about as short, as what the journal usually publishes



Look to see whether accessories (tables, photos, algorithms, imaging studies, etc) are included



Provide, or suggest, similar accessories for your article



Tip for success

Read the author guidelines



The guidelines will describe the types of articles the publication wants, what the requirements are, and how to prepare a manuscript



Step 3

Understand the writing process



The writing process

- Choose a topic and develop a schedule
- Do your research
- Organize your information and write an outline
- Write a rough draft
- Let it sit
- Revise and finalize
- Proofread



Contemporary medical writing

"What's up with the FDA lately? The regulatory agency seems to have been in the news repeatedly as one high-profile drug after another gets removed from the market or has a new 'black box' warning added to its labeling."



Where did it appear?

- *JAMA*
- *JAAPA*
- *GQ*
- *Ms.*
- *O (The Oprah Magazine)*



Remember

- Medical writing doesn't have to be boring or dry
- It can be rhetorically interesting, even elegant



Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome (before editing)

"The Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome is defined as an electrocardiographic pattern in which the QRS morphology is determined by atrioventricular (anterograde) conduction from both the atrioventricular node and an atrioventricular accessory pathway, or Kent bundle."



Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome (after editing)

"Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome is a structural congenital heart defect that affects people of all ages, often unpredictably, by virtue of its influence on cardiac conduction. It is rarely lethal, occasionally socially debilitating, and frequently a nuisance."



Remember: Less is more

Tombstone in Boot Hill Cemetery,
Tombstone, Arizona

Here Lies
Lester Moore
4 slugs from a .44
No Les
No More



The most important distinction

- What you want to say
- **versus**
- What the reader needs to know



No one said it was easy!

"A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people."

- Thomas Mann

"You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club."

- Jack London



What's the hardest part?

Tom Stoppard said:

"The hardest part is getting to the top of page 1."



Sarah Zarbock said:

"The hardest thing about writing is applying the seat of your pants to the seat of your chair"



Above all, maintain hope

"The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time — unlike, say, a brain surgeon."
- Robert Cormier

"There is no great writing, only great rewriting."
- Justice Louis Brandeis

"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."
- Walter Gretzky (Wayne's dad)



Who says editing isn't fun!

- Man has been interested in sex ever since he discovered the use of his hands.
- John left clinical practice to assume a missionary position.



Step 4

Avoid plagiarism



Some definitions

You are plagiarizing if you fail to give acknowledgement when

1. Repeating another's words (or even a particularly apt term)
2. Paraphrasing another's argument
3. Presenting another's line of thinking

(*MLA Handbook*, 4th ed)



Another definition

Plagiarism is passing off another person's work as if it were your own:

1. failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas
2. failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks
3. failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words

(*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*)



A final definition

You are plagiarizing if you fail to give credit whenever you use

1. another person's idea, opinion, or theory
2. any facts, statistics, or other pieces of information that are not common knowledge
3. quotations of another person's actual words
4. paraphrases of another person's words

(Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services)



Some plagiarism is intentional

BUT

A lot of plagiarism happens "by accident"—through ignorance, laziness, or bad habits



Strategies to avoid plagiarism

Put quotation marks around everything that comes directly from a source



More strategies

When you paraphrase, make sure you are putting the information **entirely into your own words**



Last but not least

Check your paraphrase against the original text to make sure you haven't "accidentally" copied words or phrases



Step 5

Follow the author guidelines when you prepare your manuscript



Or....

If the manuscript is already written, revise it to comply with the submission guidelines before you send it to the editor



You may want to publish

... a master's paper, a doctoral thesis, a paper that was prepared for a class, or a manuscript that was prepared originally for a different journal



Tip for success

Always revise such documents to meet the needs and requirements of your target journal



Step 6

Understand how to navigate the peer review process



Do's and don'ts

- You do NOT have to make every change reviewers have suggested
- Sometimes peer reviewers are wrong, and sometimes their comments are just not helpful



More do's and don'ts

- Do make the changes that are reasonable and consistent with your purpose in writing the article
- Do explain to the editor any changes you have chosen not to make



Step 7

Be prepared to revise



Revision is SOP

- Almost all *JAAPA* authors are asked to make revisions based on the peer reviewers' comments
- Most medical journals have manuscripts reviewed and ask authors to revise



Step 8

Expect your manuscript to change during editing



The editor's job is to edit

- The less well-written the manuscript, the more aggressively it will be edited
- Even a well-written manuscript will be edited to match the needs, style, and format of the publication



Step 9

Be a responsive and responsible author



Tips for success

- Learn about the publication's production process and deadlines
- When the editorial staff asks you to do something, do it quickly



Step 10

Work with the editor as effectively as possible



Tip for success

- Understand that the editor wears different hats
- This means: helping the author look good in print is only one part of the editor's job



The other parts

- The editor is also responsible to the readers and to the publication's mission
- An editor must make a manuscript fit the mission and make sure that readers will want to read it



However....

The editor does expect — and welcome — a give-and-take with authors



Editors are reasonable people

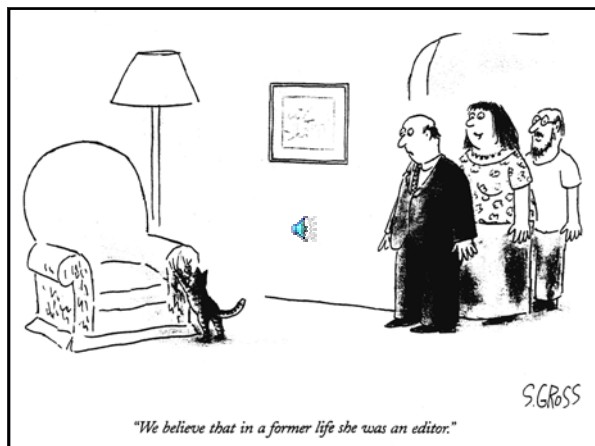
If you feel strongly about certain things—how something is phrased, whether an element is omitted or included—most editors will negotiate



Finally....

- Don't expect to get everything you want
- But do expect to get a compromise you can live with





Thank you

- JAAPA author guidelines are available online at www.jaapa.com
- E-mail the editor at jaapa@aapa.org

