



The Society for Public Health Education

#1: Thinking about getting your work published

Who should publish?

- You
- Community/coalition leaders or members
- Community practitioners and researchers
- Program managers
- Academic partners

What is standing in my way?

Although benefits are many, real and perceived barriers must be overcome to get your work in print

- Uncertainty about the publication process
- Time
- Failure to recognize your expertise
- Reluctance to put your work “out there” for critique
- Lack of confidence in scholarly writing

Why publish?

You, your staff or coalition partners may have gained useful experience about which policy, systems and environmental change strategies work or do not work. Much of this work remains unpublished and lessons learned are not shared with others. As a community health practitioner, you even may have written program summaries, grant reports, press releases, letters to the editor, or policy briefs for state legislators. However, writing for publication in an academic or professional journal or textbook somehow seems more intimidating, perhaps because it has to undergo a peer-review and professional editing process. Given the obvious fear factor and time demands you face, publishing will help you: 1-2

- Expand or share knowledge or ideas in your chosen field or discipline
- Provide useful lessons that could change others' practices in organizations worldwide
- Establish a network of people interested in your topic/methods/results who can offer feedback to enhance your work
- Provide recognition or ownership of ideas/innovations for both you and your institution
- Enhance career opportunities or advancement
- Obtain personal gratification from seeing your name in print

When and what to publish?

Now!!! You already have case examples of compelling community successes, lessons learned or outcome data to share. You may have even submitted a poster or presentation for a local meeting, grantee workshop or conference. If so, you probably wrote a summary and abstract of your work, which was reviewed prior to acceptance. Congratulations, you've already taken the first step toward publication. It's fairly easy to turn your summary, poster or PowerPoint/oral presentation itself into a written paper. If you aren't ready to embark on such an ambitious project, you could:

- Write a letter to your local newspaper editor

- Create a success story for a community newsletter
- Review a new book, cd, film, video, website or software package for a professional journal
- Volunteer as a peer reviewer to gain experience and familiarity with what is being published

What if I have no experience in writing and publishing?

Partner with others to write! Collaborative writing is helpful because:

- Multiple perspectives and ideas enrich the work
- Workload is shared
- Skills of one author can supplement deficits of other(s)
- Experienced writers can mentor new ones

Community members welcome the opportunity to co-author because professional recognition, community service and publishing are stepping stones to promotion. Potential writing partners might be colleagues, professionals and volunteers from:

- Your project team, institution or agency
- Local schools, colleges and universities
- Health and human service agencies and foundations
- Other community-based organizations

Be sure to decide order of authorship, roles and responsibilities of each author *before* you get started.

#2: Doing Your Homework

How Will I Know What Readers Want?

Before beginning to write, consider these questions about potential readers:

- Who are most likely to read your work? Who else might read it?
- What are backgrounds/careers of likely readers?
- What is main point of interest for readers?
- How much experience or familiarity are readers likely to have with your subject?
- What can readers expect to learn from your work?
- What do you want readers to do as result of reading your work?

How Will I Know What Editors Want?

Editors want even more than readers want, namely papers that:

- Interest/excite their readers, advance knowledge & lead to new ideas
- Resonate with their publication's purpose, follow guidelines & are well written
- Accurately represent the situation or work that was done

How Do I Choose a Journal or Other Publication?

Many new authors submit to publications that are inappropriate for their paper. Choose one that publishes similar material to what you plan to write. Consider these factors:

- Quality & reputation - Is publication well known and recognized by your peers or priority audience? Start with quality publications in your field - at the least, you might get good feedback to improve the paper and submit it to your next choice.
- Fit - Does the publication best fit the topic or point of your paper?
- Speed of review - How quickly will your paper be accepted and published?
- Visibility and accessibility - Is publication available in print and electronic format in libraries and pre-publication systems? Can you circulate copies? Is the publication open access?

What Type of Publication Should I Choose?

Each publication offers unique publishing opportunities, but the following are more common:

- Research Articles report original scientific results with figures, tables, references & abstract
- Review Articles summarize current knowledge about relevant subject area & outline future directions of research
- Brief Communications or Field Notes report new developments/advances, innovative methods, & relevant policies/perspectives (with 'personal' commentary) in timely, short fashion
- Trade Magazines, published by non-profit organizations, feature stories from successful community efforts; such as Y-USA's *Perspective*,
- NRPA's *Parks and Recreation*, NACDD's *Chronic Disease Chronicles*, NACCHO's *Exchange*, and SOPHE's *News and Views*.
- Editorials or Comments address significant aspects of recently published paper without being personal
- Book/Media Reviews provide a critique (not a summary) of a book, website or tool

Where Can I Find Examples of Published Work by Communities Like Mine?

Some examples of articles that have been written by people just like you may be found below:

1. Fostering Healthy Communities: Lessons Learned from CDC's Premier Community-Based Interventions, 10(2), 2009 *Suppl of Health Promotion Practice*. http://hpp.sagepub.com/content/vol10/2_suppl/
2. WISEWOMAN Works: Vol. 1(2003): A Collection of Success Stories From Program Inception through 2002. http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/pdf/success_stories.pdf. Vol. 2(2005): A Collection of Success Stories on Empowering Women to Stop Smoking. http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/pdf/vol_2/success_stories_vol2.pdf
3. Moore, E.S. 2007). Perspectives on Food Marketing and Childhood Obesity. Special section of *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.22(2):157- 242. <http://www.atypon-link.com/AMA/doi/pdf/10.1509/jppm.26.2.157>

RAFTS acronym is used to raise key issues that authors need to consider:

- **Role** – helps writer decide on point of view & voice
- **Audience** – reminds writer how to communicate ideas to others; helps determine content & style
- **Format** – helps organize ideas into various conventions (letters, interviews, reports & stories)
- **Topic or subject** – helps writer focus on main ideas
- **Strong verb** – directs writer to writing purpose, e.g., persuade, analyze, create, predict, compare, defend, or evaluate

#3: The 5 Stage Writing Process

What are the 5 Stages of the Writing Process?

Now that you know why you are writing and for whom, you are ready to embark on the 5 stages of the writing process: 1) Pre-writing or Planning; 2) Drafting; 3) Revising; 4) Editing; and 5) Publishing.

Stage 1: Pre-writing

First, think about your key messages — don't start to write until these are very clear. Then, develop an outline that organizes your work into the main parts required by most publications as follows: 1

- Abstract: 100-150 word summary of paper; usually written last
- Rationale/ objective: Why you did what you did & why you are writing about it
- Background: What available research and/or expert opinion says
- Context & setting: What was happening in your setting
- Design & methods: What you did
- Findings: What results occurred
- Analysis (discussion): What you learned from the results & what you did about it, if anything
- Conclusion: Summary of work, including limitations, lessons, or benefits for others

Test the flow of ideas and key messages to see where you might have to develop them further or add transitions. Decide where you can use tables or figures to amplify your key messages. Graphics should stand alone and the text describing them should summarize their main parts. Based on the journal's Instructions for Authors, determine the length in words or pages, required parts of the paper, and possible tables, figures and illustrations. To compute words per page using 12 point Times New Roman font, expect that an 8.5" by 11" page with 1" margins gets just short of 300 words (285+).

Stage 2: Drafting

Now you are ready to use your outline to develop a first draft of your paper. You already have thought about what you will say, so just get started. You may be surprised how fast the words come. Writing is like any other skill – it will improve with practice. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar at this stage. The idea is to get it down, then get it right. Date each draft to show how they improve – and to assure that no ideas are lost that you may need later. Draft the body and graphics of the paper first, then add the introduction, conclusion, abstract, acknowledgements, title and author information.

Stage 3: Revising

Reread and take a second look at the previous draft(s). Ask yourself if this is your best work. Is it clear? Does it make sense? Rearrange sentences, paragraphs and transitions to create a logical flow of ideas. Find clumsy or overused words and phrases and replace them with simpler ones. Shorten sentences of 20 words or more and paragraphs of 8 sentences or more (Dixon, 2001). Use solid sentence structure and substitute strong nouns and verbs for the passive voice.

Stage 4: Editing

Get out your red pen (or computer highlighter tool). Correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. Run the spell and grammar check from your computer software. Put the paper away for a few days and edit again – and again. Enlist an accomplished writer with no vested interest in your project to proofread the paper for clarity and errors. Friends and family can also provide feedback on clarity and flow of ideas.

Stage 5: Publishing

Make sure that your final draft is as perfect as possible. Now, you are ready to submit your paper!

What Does a Sample Abstract Look Like?

Hanni, KD, Garcia, E., Ellemberg, C., & Winkleby, H. (2009). Targeting the Taqueria: Implementing Healthy Food Options at Mexican American Restaurants. *Health Promotion Practice, 10* (2): 91-9 S.

As part of a 5-year community-based intervention in Salinas, California, the Steps to a Healthier Salinas team developed a taqueria intervention addressing obesity and diabetes among Mexican Americans.

The authors present: (a) a comparison of service/entrée options for Salinas taquerias (n = 35) and fast-food restaurants (n = 38) at baseline, (b) a case study of one taqueria, (c) a description of a healthy nutrition toolkit tailored to taquerias, and (d) an evaluation of the intervention at Year 3. It was found that traditional Mexican American– style menu offerings at taquerias tended to be healthier than American-style fast-food restaurant offerings. In addition, the initial response to the intervention has shown positive changes, which include the taqueria owners promoting available healthy menu items and modifying other menu offerings to reduce fats and increase fruit and vegetable availability.

This, in turn, has led to a transition of the owners' perceptions of themselves as gatekeepers for a healthy community.

#4: Navigating the Publication Process

Now that your final draft is ready and properly formatted, do one last review using this checklist as a guide:

Write a short cover letter that thanks the editors for reading your paper, briefly explains your project, and includes your credentials. Many papers are submitted electronically; the process varies with each journal, so follow directions carefully.

Checklist for Publication:

- Is subject important to others, specific & well defined? Are purpose & objectives clearly outlined?
- Have you researched the literature & provided proper citations & accurate summary?
- Was original research or replication of project carried out properly? Was permission obtained to use materials from other authors/journals? Are methods/tools appropriate & clearly described?
- Do you have relevant findings to present? Are figures/tables clear? Have you analyzed & interpreted findings correctly?
- Do conclusions follow from results?
- Have you noted limitations or ethical concerns? Did any positive or unintended actions result?
- Did you learn any lessons that would be valuable to share with others?

How Does the Review Process Work?

Review may take from 3-6 months, so don't be discouraged. The journal editor selects 2-3 reviewers for each paper who are experts in the subject area, may be cited in the work and are not mentioned in the acknowledgements. Reviewers use a written set of criteria and rating system for their review. The papers are assigned to the reviewers as "blinded", that is, the reviewer does not have access to the author(s) name or contact information. The editor makes the final decision on whether or not the paper is published, based on reviewers' recommendations. The following categories of recommendations are generally used: Accept; Revise and resubmit (or Accept with Minor or Major Revisions); or Reject.

Accept: Since this rarely occurs on the first submission, this is a cause for celebration!

Revise and Resubmit: After reading the reviewers'/editor's comments, receive them in the spirit of constructive criticism. Experienced authors will tell you that most papers they revise are better after the revision. The best course is to put the paper aside for a week or two and think about what is being asked of you. Then get to work and make the necessary changes. In a follow-up letter to the editor, specifically state how you corrected each deficiency. If you have good cause not to change a particular aspect of the paper, state why you believe you are correct or why it is not possible to make the suggested edit. Be polite and not defensive, but also don't be intimidated. You will receive galley proofs shortly before publication that must be carefully checked for accuracy and returned within 24-48 hours of receipt. You may not make major edits, only correct errors.

What if My Paper Gets Rejected?

Even accomplished authors must learn to deal with rejection. The best course of action is to wait for a couple of weeks, then really consider the reviewers' comments. Hopefully, you will decide to use the valuable feedback you received to revise your paper and resubmit to another journal. This is a competitive process and your chances will improve over time

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Basic Writing Skills Checklist

Structure

- Title - specific; include key words that enhance referencing later
- Abstract – short summary of article Introduction
- Emphasize relevance of topic to make reader want to know more
- End with statement of purpose Background - set the stage Review of relevant literature Methods (if applicable) Results (if applicable)
- Discussion of results; limitations & biases Conclusion

Style

- Make concepts clear to those unfamiliar with the topic
- Explain ideas not universally known or accepted
- Use precise language to communicate meaning
- Spell out acronyms & avoid jargon Make pronoun references clear, avoid passive voice
- Avoid broad generalizations

Flow

- Label sections of paper with headers Create transitions between sections Break down complex ideas in section into paragraphs that proceed from general to specific
- Open each paragraph with strong topic sentence that prepares reader for what will follow
- Develop interrelations among sentences in paragraph with details and examples Conclude paragraph by restating major point reader might have forgotten
- Create smooth transitions between paragraphs in each section

Credibility

- Demonstrate command of subject to establish credibility and expertise
- Support claims with references from reputable, recent sources
- Provide research support for all theoretical claims
- Adhere to Style manual standards

Lunney, M., & Alward, R. (2007). Guidelines for writing scholarly papers: Handbook for graduate students, 3rd Ed. New York: Hunter- Bellevue School of Nursing.

Dixon, N. (2001). Writing for publication- A guide for new authors. *Int'l J Qual Health Care*, 15(5):417-21.

Duff, D. (2001), Writing for Publication. *Axone*, 22(4): 36-9.

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. (2009). Designing Rafts Writing

Assignments. <http://doe.sd.gov/curriculum/6plus1/docs/educators/docs/RAFTS.pdf>

Thompson, P.J. How to choose the right journal for your manuscript. (2007). *Chest*, 32; 1073-76.