

From Idea to Acceptance: Strategies for Successful Publishing in Counseling

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The execution and public dissemination of research is critical to the field of counseling (Kottler & Shepard, 2015). As such, this article reviews literature on writing and publishing manuscripts in order to provide counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training with guidance for successfully publishing in counseling journals. To that end, this article describes guidelines for developing manuscripts commonly found in the counseling literature. Further, the article examines ethical principles (ACA, 2014) crucial for research and publication.

Keywords: Publication guidelines, manuscript writing, counseling journals

Writing a manuscript can be an overwhelming and time-consuming task. Authors assume a challenge when endeavoring to produce a well-articulated scholarly article. This challenge is often amplified by low acceptance rates of journals. If authors wish to become published in academic outlets of the American Counseling Association (ACA), including the Journal of the Pennsylvania Counseling Association (JPCA), it is important to create quality papers that contribute novel ideas to the mental health field. This article summarizes guidance derived from a review of literature addressing writing and publication.

Editors and reviewers dissect every aspect of a manuscript; thus, authors must ensure that submitted manuscripts are refined to the last detail. In fact, certain sections of a manuscript might require 25 to 30 revisions (Overholser, 2011). While this might seem tedious, careful editing of a manuscript will assist in gaining favorable ratings from reviewers and journal editors. For further guidance on how to obtain favorable ratings, authors might rely on a variety of academic and personal resources including published articles (e.g., Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008; Overholser, 2011), textbooks and published resources (e.g., American Psychological Association; APA, 2009), and mentors and colleagues (Milsom, 2010).

General Guidelines

Journals are often selective in choosing articles to

publish. There is little space for manuscripts that ignore details, present disorganized thoughts, or relay inconsequential information. As a result, authors must ensure that manuscripts are organized and clearly written. Counseling journals seek manuscripts that present valid, well-articulated concepts about significant issues in the mental health field (Drotar, 2009; Overholser, 2011).

Manuscript Foundations

Manuscript writing begins with the formation of an idea that addresses an important topic in the field that is also of interest to the author (Ling Pan, 2008). This idea should be an original concept based in theory and/or research; it is ideal to develop a topic that balances scholarliness and creativity (Milsom, 2010). For example, it is expected that the research offered will be of scholarly significance, but it can be framed within new perspectives (Milsom, 2010). Similarly, when looking to publish, it is necessary to consider the timeliness and relevance of the topic. The subject matter should address the current needs and trends of professional counseling (Milsom, 2010; Ling Pan, 2008). Additionally, the manuscript should present a strong rationale that clearly articulates the significance of the concept (Overholser, 2011). Once an idea has been developed, the author should create a plan for organizing, writing, and submitting the manuscript (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008).

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In the early stages of manuscript development, it is important to select the journal to which the article will be submitted. Authors should examine journals that publish articles with a similar focus as their manuscript. Cabell's International (<http://www.cabells.com>) is an example of a website that provides a complete list of journals that are relevant to a topic area. The acceptance rate, submission requirements, and reviewing process of each journal should be considered when selecting the journal for submission; the relative importance of each of these factors will depend on the needs of the authors. After selecting the journal to which the manuscript will be submitted, authors should read articles from that journal. This can assist in determining the journal's audience, structure, and writing style (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008).

It is also important to decide who will contribute to the submission. If several authors are collaborating on the same manuscript, the order of authorship should be discussed early in the process. Ideally, this order is determined by the quantity and quality of the contributions; thus, the lead author should be the one who is most involved in the project (ACA, 2014; Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008). An article that is developed largely from the work of a student should be credited to the student as lead author (ACA, 2014). The lead author is responsible for communicating with the journal editor and co-authors, organizing the manuscript development process, and creating a timeline for submission (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008).

Manuscript Writing

After determining authorship, it is time to begin the writing process. This process can be difficult, tedious, and overwhelming. Authors may find it helpful to first generate an outline. This can provide structure and accelerate writing (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008). In addition, there are several guidelines that assist authors to enhance writing quality, including maintaining smoothness and continuity of expression, developing clear and concise paragraphs, and noticing fine details (APA, 2009).

Smooth and continuous writing ensures that the main ideas of the manuscript are conveyed in a clear and logical manner. There are several ways to create consistent and fluid writing. First, fluidity can be achieved through employing transitional words, such as "although," "in addition," and "furthermore." This can help authors efficiently shift from one topic to another. Continuity can be attained through the reliable use of verb tenses. Authors should employ the past tense when discussing methods, results, and previous research; the present tense should be used when presenting implication of the results and drawing conclusions. Further, continuity and smoothness can be maintained

by using pronouns to avoid word repetition. When used in moderation, pronouns can prevent the writing of monotonous prose; however, authors should avoid the overuse of pronouns as they can create ambiguity in the manuscript (APA, 2009).

In addition to fluidity, scientific writing should be clear and concise. Authors should utilize brief, direct sentences and remove all unnecessary wording. Each statement should add an important piece of information to the manuscript. Authors should not describe gratuitous ideas or explain evident concepts. Abbreviations should be used sparingly as they can cause sentences to become meaningless. Generally, only widely accepted abbreviations and acronyms should be employed. This will assist in developing straightforward prose that readers can easily understand (APA, 2009; Overholser, 2011).

Attention to detail is another important aspect of manuscript writing (Milsom, 2010). When authors submit a manuscript with obvious formatting, spelling, and grammar issues, reviewers might question the authors' meticulousness when performing the research. Reviewers and editors might assume that these authors were as careless in their research as they were in their manuscript. As a result, authors should proofread the paper several times. Additionally, authors should enlist the assistance of peers and colleagues to review the manuscript before submission. This will ensure that formatting, spelling, and grammar problems are resolved (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008; Overholser, 2011).

Developing Sections of a Manuscript

Titles are the first aspect of a manuscript noticed by readers; they assist individuals in identifying articles of interest. As a result, titles should be concise, informative, and functional. Authors should avoid developing witty titles that contain futile phrases (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2007). According to the APA (2009), titles should consist of no more than 12 words. Within these few words, authors must convey the main idea of the manuscript. This is best accomplished by including the names of the constructs being studied (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2007).

For a more in depth description of the article, readers examine the abstract. Abstracts are brief, comprehensive summaries (Overholser, 2011), consisting of about 150 words (APA, 2009). Due to this constraint, authors must use words wisely and ensure that the abstract is dense with information. Authors may find it helpful to write the abstract after the manuscript is complete. This allows time to review the paper and develop an inclusive synopsis (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2007).

Sequentially, the next element of a journal article is

a literature review. In this section, authors must develop a strong rationale based in past research and theory (APA, 2009). Authors should assume that readers are apathetic to the importance of the manuscript; thus, it is the authors' duty to convince readers that the manuscript is a significant contribution to the mental health field (Drotar, 2009). In order to persuade readers, authors must write a focused and comprehensive literature review. The authors should display a strong understanding of the concepts being examined. They should employ literature written in the past five years and avoid using sources that have failed to undergo peer review, such as unpublished manuscripts and conference presentations (Overholser, 2011). Authors should integrate several sources and highlight gaps in literature. Through highlighting these gaps, authors can present a rationale for how their manuscript will add to previous research (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008; Pyrczak & Bruce, 2007). By the conclusion of the literature review, readers should gather a basic knowledge of the concepts being studied and recognize the novel contributions of the manuscript to the mental health field.

References are the last element of a manuscript. Most mental health and counseling journals, including JPCA, follow the guidelines developed by the APA (2009). References should be inclusive of all literature needed to support the authors' claims. Only references cited in the paper should be incorporated into the reference list. Before submitting a manuscript, authors should crosscheck to make certain that all citations are included in the references and all references are cited in the text. Notably, digital object identifiers (DOIs) are a recently added component of references; they were developed to provide an electronic means of identifying and managing information, including published manuscripts (APA, 2009). Resources such as CrossRef.org can assist authors in ascertaining DOIs that are not easily identified on articles. Furthermore, authors must verify the accuracy of the information included in the references, including authors' names and publication dates (Pyrczak & Bruce, 2007). While this can be tedious task, it is important because it displays to editors and reviewers a meticulous attention to detail (Overholser, 2011).

Types of Articles

Scholarly articles can vary significantly depending on the profession, the topic, and the journal. In professional counseling, a wide range of scholarly works are published in refereed journals. Articles accepted for review and publication in counseling journals typically include conceptual articles (Callahan, 2010), practice articles (Falco & McCarthy, 2013), and

qualitative and quantitative empirical articles (Pyrczak & Bruce, 2007).

Conceptual Articles

There are various kinds of conceptual articles. Examples include (a) theoretical articles, (b) integrated literature reviews, (c) reaction pieces, and (d) professional issues manuscripts (Callahan, 2010). While conceptual rather than empirical in nature, these articles often make significant and meaningful contributions to professional counseling.

Theoretical conceptual articles are often the means by which new theories are generated, old theories are renewed, or multiple existing theories are integrated for the first time (Callahan, 2010). Theoretical articles offer an in-depth consideration of the theory presented. The theory's history and development is fully vetted in the article; if the theory or its application is new, it is compared to others in order to demonstrate both strengths and weaknesses. Unlike empirical articles, data is typically omitted, unless it is relevant to the conceptualization or the assessment of the theory (Callahan, 2010).

Integrated literature reviews are conceptual articles that methodically study previously published literature such that the given study can be replicated (Callahan, 2010). Integrated literature reviews seek to assess the integrity and results of previous literature in order to help clarify a defined problem (Callahan, 2010). As such, authors of integrated literature reviews have the task of explaining the problem and its significance to the field of counseling in addition to accurately summarizing and assessing any previous research that is related to the problem. Oftentimes, in the discussion section, integrated literature reviews suggest paths for future research or provide specific steps for how to resolve the identified problem.

Other forms of conceptual articles include reaction articles and articles that explore professional issues (Watts, 2011). Reaction articles give authors the opportunity to respond to previously published works from their point of view, often supported by literature related to the topic. Articles that explore and clarify professional issues might cover a wide range of topics related to counseling, such as developing a professional identity, ethics, conducting supervision, changing public policy, and advancing multicultural competence.

While conceptual articles include various subjects, they can be more difficult to write than empirical articles (Watts, 2011). A rigorous conceptual article requires considerable knowledge of the concept as well as extensive planning and preparation. Idea generation is the first challenge that authors must overcome when writing a conceptual article. Ideas can be developed from reading other conceptual articles, especially in the

journal to which submission is planned (Watts, 2011). In order to develop ideas, Salomone (1993) recommended that authors (a) become highly knowledgeable of the literature related to the topic, (b) converse with colleagues about the topic to form and clarify ideas, and (c) write about the topic to further personal understanding.

After generating an idea, authors must decide how to format conceptual articles. In contrast to empirical articles, conceptual articles tend to lack standardized formatting (Watts, 2011). Watts (2011) offered the following model for organizing a conceptual article. First, begin with an introduction, in which the purpose of the article is stated. The introduction informs readers of the article's content and captures their attention (Watts, 2011). Follow the introduction with a strong review of the related literature. The literature review creates a context for the earlier stated purpose. In this section, it is important to present multiple viewpoints that are supported in the literature; providing only literature that affirms the author's position might lead to damaged credibility (Watts, 2011). Next, present the new concept, theory, or position with a detailed description (Watts, 2011). Lastly, include a discussion and implications section. This section helps readers better understand what was previously presented by offering interpretations and clarification. Implications specific to the field of counseling are discussed in the discussion as well (Watts, 2011). Following a model such as this will create flow, maintain organization, and allow for easier reading of your conceptual article.

Practice Articles

Practice articles are scholarly manuscripts that focus on counseling interventions. Areas addressed in practice articles include counseling interventions and techniques, professional experiences with counseling clients, program applications, and training and supervision approaches (Falco & McCarthy, 2013). While the content of a practice article may appear to overlap with conceptual articles, practice articles are distinct in that they provide a level of detail that allows the intervention or approach to be replicated by readers.

Practice articles, like conceptual articles, frequently lack standard formatting; the APA (2009) recommends, "continuity in presentation of ideas" (p. 65). To enhance the flow of counseling practice articles, authors should start with an introduction that clearly states the purpose of the article. The introduction in a practice article includes a review of pertinent literature with the intention of providing context for the approach or technique. The introductory literature review emphasizes the importance of and the need for the specific practice (Falco & McCarthy, 2013; Guiffreda, Schwitzer, & Choate, 2006). The introduction also

incorporates details as to common uses of the intervention, the population for which the intervention is appropriate, and research in support of the intervention. The next section provides a review of methods. The method section includes detailed descriptions of the development of the intervention, the intervention itself, and specific goals of the intervention (Falco & McCarthy, 2013). Elements that will bolster a practice article's method section include operational definitions of constructs, identification of materials required for implementation, and a description of the role of the counseling professional (Falco & McCarthy, 2013). Case examples should also be included as the author sees fit to illustrate the intervention for readers (Falco & McCarthy, 2013; Guiffreda et al., 2006).

Following the method section, a practice article might present results. The results section reviews the expected outcomes of the intervention. The information in this section might inform future empirical investigations of the intervention. As such, it is necessary to describe appropriate outcome measures and pilot data, if available. As with most scholarly works, practice articles end with a discussion section. Here, it is essential to connect the originally stated purpose with the goals and outcomes of the intervention (Falco & McCarthy, 2013). Additionally, the counseling intervention is discussed in relation to matters of diversity and multicultural competence in professional counseling (Falco & McCarthy, 2013). The results section acknowledges limitations and offers suggestions for future research. Case examples should also be included as the author sees fit to illustrate the intervention for readers (Falco & McCarthy, 2013; Guiffreda et al., 2006). While counseling practice articles might vary slightly from this model, adhering to an organized format will enhance the article and increase the likelihood of publication.

Qualitative Articles

Qualitative articles present empirical research that is conducted through immersion (Hunt, 2011). Qualitative research is conducted when there is limited information available regarding a topic or when there is a desire to explore areas of existing research in greater detail (Hunt, 2011; Rubel & Villalba, 2009). Naturalistic observations and exploratory research that omits manipulation and pre-determined hypotheses constitute qualitative research. Qualitative research is conducted in order to answer research questions, enhance understanding of various phenomena, and learn about client's experiences. While qualitative research is common in the social sciences, there are numerous forms of qualitative methodologies (Hunt, 2011). As such, it can be confusing to determine how to format and develop a well-reasoned, rational qualitative

article specific to professional counseling (Rubel & Villalba, 2009).

To improve organization for readers, authors should begin by crafting a thorough literature review (Hunt, 2011). The literature review stresses the relevancy of the phenomenon in question to professional counseling. In this section, it is necessary to justify the use of the qualitative methodology selected (Hunt, 2011; Rubel & Villalba, 2009). This is accomplished by identifying the gaps in the literature and the guiding research questions that stem from these gaps (Hunt, 2011). It is important for authors to state research questions clearly so that readers understand the purpose of the article (Rubel & Villalba, 2009). Next, a method section includes an exhaustive overview of the development of the study (Hunt, 2011). The methods section should incorporate details of the roles and biases of the involved researchers, selection and demographics of participants, description of participant activity, and explanation of data analyses. Following the method section, a findings section reports identified patterns in participant responses; tables or figures might accompany the findings section. The findings also discuss the researchers' roles and possible influences on the investigation outcomes. In this section, it is important to clearly support all claims with concrete examples (Frieze, 2008). Finally, a discussion section summarizes findings and connects them to the previous literature (Frieze, 2008; Hunt, 2011). As with other manuscripts, this section includes strengths and weaknesses as well as implications for counseling professionals. Qualitative research may have less standardization in terms of conceptualization and formatting, but the rigor of qualitative research, when offered in an organized manner, can offer valuable scholarly contributions.

Quantitative Articles

Quantitative research articles recount systematic empirical investigations, guided by a priori hypotheses and analyzed with statistical procedures. When developing quantitative research, Trusty (2011) notes that the most important decisions are made prior to data collection. Two recommendations for enhancing the investigation and subsequent manuscript are (a) becoming versed in the relevant literature and (b) conducting a pilot study.

Authors have the most direction when writing quantitative articles in comparison to other types of manuscripts. Guidelines provided by APA (2009) are specific, calling for rigor and detailing expectations for each section of an empirical article. The first section required is the introduction or literature review. This section identifies the problem the research plans to address and overviews the related literature base.

Before beginning the next section, the hypotheses are presented (Granello, 2007). The method section follows the literature review, and it describes the research design fully, including participation recruitment, participant demographics, interventions, and instrumentation (Granello, 2007). Next, the results section details the outcomes of the investigation (Granello, 2007). Specifically, this section explains the statistical analyses utilized. It offers results in the context of the previously stated hypotheses. The results are inclusive of all analyses employed, regardless of the support they offer for the hypotheses (Granello, 2007). A discussion section concludes a quantitative article. This section presents a concise overview of the study, key findings and connects findings to the earlier literature review. As is typical in a discussion, this section offers strengths and limitations. Finally, the discussion proposes implications for professional counseling and suggestions for future research.

Publication Ethics

In order to maintain the integrity of scholarly publishing, the ACA (2014) includes a section on Research and Publication in the code of ethics. This section of the code consists of five main principles: (a) research responsibilities, (b) rights of research participants, (c) managing and maintaining boundaries, (d) reporting results, and (e) publications and presentations. Each of these principles contains several guidelines that serve to instruct authors about how to be honest and just researchers.

The first ethical principle describes the researcher's responsibilities, including following ethical guidelines, maintaining confidentiality, adhering to standard practices, and avoiding harm to participants (ACA, 2014). According to the second principle, which emphasizes participants' rights, researchers are mandated to ascertain informed consent from participants, explain the purpose of the research following participation, and maintain records according to established procedures (ACA, 2014). The third principle addresses maintaining appropriate relationships with participants and avoiding sexual relationships or sexual harassment of participants (ACA, 2014). In reporting results, which is the fourth principle, authors have a responsibility to accurately report their findings. Moreover, unfavorable findings and errors in reporting should be made public (ACA, 2014). In the fifth principle, publication and presentation, authors are tasked with maintaining the confidentiality of participants. Further, this principle denounces plagiarism, asserts acknowledgement of previous work and the contributions of other authors, and forbids duplicate submissions (ACA, 2014).

While these guidelines are basic, they are a vital aspect of scholarly writing. Authors must be aware of these ethical principles and follow them closely. Many aspects related to publication ethics are unmonitored; thus, journal editors and reviewers rely on the honesty of authors to maintain the integrity of manuscript development and publication.

Conclusion

While manuscript writing is a demanding endeavor, sharing the latest research and knowledge with practicing counselors is critical to the advancement of the field (Kottler & Shepard, 2015). Therefore, this article aimed to synthesize the current literature on publishing in counseling, assisting authors in creating quality, original manuscripts. Exceptional papers address significant issues in a clear and concise manner. They include descriptive titles and abstracts, convincing literature reviews, and detailed references. While the formatting of a manuscript varies based on its type (i.e., conceptual, practice, qualitative, or quantitative), all manuscripts must be direct, logical, and fluid. Further, in their development of manuscripts, authors must follow the guiding principles of the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), observing the professional standards for research and publishing established by the counseling field.

Importantly, after engaging in the demanding process of manuscript development and submission, authors face a final challenge: coping with and responding to feedback from reviewers and editors. At best, authors can anticipate receiving the manuscript back from the journal's editor with a request for revision; revision and resubmission is a common part of the publication process (Kalpakjian & Meade, 2008). Sometimes, feedback can be discouraging and confusing. After spending a copious amount of time and energy developing a manuscript, it can be difficult to heed the critical suggestions of reviewers. Despite this, authors are urged to read all comments completely and address each suggestion. Maintaining an open and responsive approach to reviewer's and editor's feedback will assist authors in achieving a favorable outcome, which is successfully publishing in a professional counseling journal.

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