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Publishing in Clinical Research

Most of us who are interested in publishing want to express new ideas or share what we know with others more than to see our names in bright lights. To be honest, publishing holds great rewards for those in clinical research: It can help establish your reputation, promote you and your company, and inspire the envy of your colleagues. Defining your publishing goals and objectives is important, as is understanding that most writers are rejected the first few times they submit. Remember, too, that publishing can be a “numbers game”: The more often you submit, the better your chances of getting published.

Where to Publish?

Most writers think of familiar journals when they consider publication. If you have been reading *The Monitor* for 20 years, enjoy it, and feel it carries articles similar to yours, then it makes sense to try for publication there. But what if you do not get published in *The Monitor*? What if your article is rejected again and again?

Consider other venues. Peer-reviewed or refereed journals are great places to get published; they are well read and respected by those in the industry. If your article is published in a peer-reviewed journal, it will presumably be read by experts in your field. Keep in mind, though, that getting published in peer-reviewed publications is extremely difficult, and, depending on their size, peer reviewed journals may have many more submissions than non-peer-reviewed journals.

The first article I wrote was, I thought, worthy of publication in the most revered peer-reviewed journal in my field. I was certain that the reviewers would love my piece, think me a genius, and beg for more of my work. My article was rejected, and along with the rejections came comments. I was devastated. I was not a genius, and clearly my article had no place in the prestigious journal.

With some rewriting and rethinking, I could have submitted my article to another, smaller peer-reviewed journal. At that time, however, I did not realize any other peer-reviewed journals existed, because I had not done my homework. If you have never been published, consider peer-reviewed journals with a small circulation. These smaller journals often get fewer submissions and are hungry for new ideas and unpublished writers. You may find some small peer-reviewed journals outside your field that publish articles closely related to your subject matter, which would welcome an outside perspective.

If you are not dead-set on a peer-reviewed journal, you have lots of options! There are many non-peer-reviewed journals as highly regarded as their peer-reviewed cousins.

In addition to journals, consider magazines, newspapers, online journals, newsletters, and even blogging. Although some may disparage mainstream magazines, they can be a good fit for particular articles. The average layperson does not read the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to find out about the latest drug recall; he or she relies on magazines like *Redbook*, *Woman's Day*, or *Ladies' Home Journal*. Though getting published in these major magazines can be difficult, it is not impossible, and many smaller lay magazines on the market also seek relevant content with a fresh viewpoint.

Submitting your article to a newspaper in the form of an opinion piece is another option. An opinion piece, which is shorter than an average article, provides a tremendous opportunity for "testing the waters." It may be widely read, and the resultant feedback can be a terrific way to better focus your ideas for a longer article, hone in on your target audience, and define your goals.

Online journals are another good venue. They require fresh, rotating content quite frequently, which can mean a wonderful opportunity for publication. The online publishing environment can be a great place for articles that do not fit into the traditional publishing sphere, and your article can be read instantaneously by hundreds of people. You do not have to wait several months to see your article in print, so if you are writing about a cutting-edge topic, an online journal may be your best bet.

Newsletters are another great place to "get your feet wet" in publishing, and I encourage would-be authors to seek newsletters that might publish in their field or in complementary fields. The first article I published was in a newsletter. It was a short article, but it got me published! The beauty of a newsletter is that, though circulation is small, it is very focused. Your article will be read primarily by those who are interested in your ideas. If the topic is interesting or hotly debated, or if readers feel strongly about it, you will get feedback. Again, this feedback can help you fine-tune your article and test the soundness of your ideas.

Finally, there is blogging. Blogging, or web logging, is now a grownup game, and many major news outlets and businesses

are blogging to keep their customers and clients up-to-date, generate interest in their products, or provide a new perspective. Blogging costs very little; blogs can be read by millions; and the medium allows you to get feedback from strangers, much like a peer-reviewed journal. I ask the students in my scientific writing class at Duke University to set up blogs, and I am amazed at the ideas they generate. One student, for instance, wrote poetry in her blog; because her blog was accessible to anyone with internet access, her poetry was read by many people, and she received some great feedback. Although I would not suggest posting your complete article on a blog, offering bits and pieces to generate interest can be a good idea.

Finally, try to find a venue where you can present your paper; at a conference, for instance, or in your school or workplace. Most people are very willing to provide feedback on works in progress. Because you are "testing the waters" in a face-to-face setting, you can clearly gauge your listeners' interest in your topic.

Do Your Homework

If you decide you want to publish, either in print or online, do your homework. Understand what journals might be a good fit for your piece. This means more than a cursory glance at a journal; it means reading several issues, perhaps even several years of issues, cover to cover. Understanding the kinds of articles the journal accepts will help you decide if your piece fits, and reviewing several journals means that if your article is rejected by the first one, you will have options for sending it elsewhere. If I had done such research for my first would-be article, I would have realized that I had many more options for publishing, and I probably would have understood that my first choice for publication was not the best choice.

You must determine what your target audience is and what its needs are. Journal editors typically have a certain type of reader in mind, but some issues do not reflect this ideal as clearly as others. Therefore, reading several articles and several issues of the same journal can give you a good feel for the interests of its readers. Look carefully at the language, the style (formal or informal), and the

writers' credentials. Understanding what a journal expects will help you achieve your publication goals.

In addition to ensuring that the journal will accept an article from someone with your credentials and that your article suits the journal, you need to ensure that your article fills a need for the journal and its readers. If it is a topic that has been covered extensively, you may need to determine how you can write about it in a new and different way in order to appeal to the journal and its readers. Researching various journals will show you what topics are "hot" or not. Even if your topic does not qualify as "hot," you may be able to find a publisher after you have done enough homework.

When you have identified several journals where your article fits and you understand what the journals are looking for in terms of topics and author credentials, review the journals' submission guidelines. Many journals publish their submission guidelines; go online to find the most current ones. These guidelines must be followed exactly; they are not suggestions, and not following them can mean that your article, no matter how good it is, gets rejected.

Conclusion

The world of publishing has expanded tremendously, and offers many more opportunities than it did even 10 years ago. If you have your heart set on publishing in a peer-reviewed journal, go for it! But consider venues like newsletters, online journals, non-peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, and even blogging, especially if you are uncertain where your article would best fit. Understand that publishing means many rewrites and honing your piece so that it is suitable for publication. The satisfaction of seeing your words in print can make it all worthwhile! **ACRP**

Pam Hurley, PhD, president of Hurley Write, Inc., has worked since 1988 with contract research, life sciences, biotechnology, and pharma organizations developing and teaching writing courses. She also teaches scientific writing to the University of North Carolina's biomedical students and in Duke University's Clinical Research Management Program. She has developed online writing-intensive courses, which are used by various companies to train their employees. She can be reached at pam@hurleywrite.com.