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# Writing a paper for publication in “Working Papers in the Health Sciences”

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## Abstract

This paper is specifically designed to help authors write scholarly papers for publication in “Working Papers in the Health Sciences” (WPHS). A comprehensive model based on 11 steps and detailing the specific architecture expected for the journal is suggested for the writing of a range of papers. This is commensurate with the recognised style of similar academic journals.

## Introduction

Working Papers in The Health Sciences is a peer-reviewed e journal hosted by The University of Southampton. In addition to facilitating emerging scholarly output from the healthcare academic community, a primary aim of the journal is to help undergraduate and post graduate health care professionals publish and showcase early stage academic work of a high standard. Post graduate students at early milestone stages of a PhD or clinical /taught doctorate programmes will find WPHS an especially suitable destination for initial academic output. The primary mission of this journal is to promote the development of health care knowledge and practice across the United Kingdom and beyond. The editor of WPHS welcomes manuscripts on a wide range of relevant topics and in a variety of forms:

### Research

- Original emerging research reports
- Research proposals
- Service evaluations
- Critical reviews of the literature

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### Pedagogy and clinical practice

- Evidence based reports of clinical developments
- Theoretical or philosophical debate
- Pedagogical innovation

### Series C: Student contributions

- Abridged student projects
- Health Care Dissertation Literature reviews

Many early career health care professionals believe that writing for publication is something that other people do i.e. Academics that have all the research at their fingertips, this is a wrong assumption. There is no mystery attached to writing for publication, it is a skill that anyone with the right amount of determination and application can acquire. All health care professionals and health care students whose work brings them into contact with patients/clients in clinical practice can be helped to write for publication. In particular, the reflective experiences of students in practice environments often reveal deficits which may help other practitioners to deliver better care, or to avoid unnecessary mistakes. Additionally such publications can function as a dissemination platform for the sharing of ideas. It is however important for novice authors to follow a systematic approach to the writing a scholarly

journal paper as this helps provide a structure that contains key messages and ideas for potential readers (Dixon 2001).

## Deciding what to write

The diverse parameters of WPHS is designed to encourage experienced and novice writers to select a topic that they are personally interested in and have investigated through their work, and where there is a paucity of information available in the traditional published press. Most topics are worth writing about. Like other journals WPHS seeks up-to-date referenced evidence based articles pertinent to all aspects of patient/client care.

- If you have written an assignment or a dissertation for an undergraduate or post graduate course, it may be adapted into an article suitable for publication in WPHS. Significant scholarly work which has been awarded a high grade should not be wasted but it will need adaptation before it is suitable for publication in a peer reviewed journal. It is important not to send the editor of WPHS copies of actual unmodified assignments as this will result in an automatic rejection.
- If you have implemented innovative work practices or pedagogical innovation then share them with others through publication in WPHS.
- If you are choosing a topic that features regularly in the professional press or at conferences, make sure that you give it a new slant, perhaps by reporting changes in practice based on best evidence.
- If you choose a topic that is seldom aired, do not assume that this is because it is of no interest. Your

article could be the first step in solving a pertinent health care problem or issue.

- If you are unsure whether your article will be of value, send in an abstract to WPHS and do not be frightened of contacting a member of WPHS's editorial team. WPHS welcome approaches from authors.

N.B it is important not to be overly ambitious when choosing a topic for WPHS. The journal is designed to publish specific aspects of work not necessarily complete studies. Do not try to cover too many points and cram too much information into a paper for WPHS as this will prevent the paper becoming too unstructured and unfocused. Try to adopt a specific position and do not allow yourself to get side-tracked. The most important factor in facilitating a wider appreciation of the work you have undertaken is your own motivation to convert it into a publishable format. Without this your work will simply languish on your book shelf gathering dust! Much academic work conducted within the health sciences arena has a limited shelf life and you must be prepared to seize the opportunity to publish this work during the lifetime of that opportunity.

### **Decide who you are writing for**

One of the most important rules in writing is to remember your reader. The level at which you write and the content of your article will be dictated by who you want to read it. For example, if you are writing for specialist colleagues, you can probably assume they have a greater depth of knowledge than non-specialist colleagues, who will need to be given more information. Never take it for granted that your readers know what you are talking about. Always substantiate your comments and signpost the reader to further reading with relevant references.

### **WPHS guidelines for authors.**

The full guidelines for the journal are available on-line via the journal website. Read these carefully and keep referring to them as you are writing your article. Never submit a paper in the style of another journal as this does not give a

good impression to the editor.

### **Writing and structuring your article for WPHS**

- In addition to links to health sciences practice, all papers for WPHS must begin life with a comprehensive review of the pertinent literature. Therefore an ability to search and interrogate the healthcare bibliographic data bases is crucial and your local health care librarian may be able to offer assistance. It is important that you do not rely solely on internet search engines such as Google Scholar to find all the material you may need to help you write your paper for WPHS.
- The difficult part of writing is getting the structure right. Editors can sort out language errors but not a badly structured article. You need to ensure a logical flow of ideas and keep to WPHS word limit. Look at how other published authors have structured their work and talk to colleagues who have experience of writing.
- If you are clear in your mind what it is you have to say and who you are writing for, you will have less difficulty structuring the article and deciding what points to cover.
- Certain types of article tend to follow specific formats, e.g. literature reviews and research studies. Case studies and articles discussing for example, work and practice development initiatives, will be harder to write and structure as there is no real standard format. However this paper gives a model of writing which can be applied to any type of scholarly paper.
- Whatever the type of article you are writing; you will not get the structure right first time. You will need to practise. Even experienced authors need to write several drafts of a paper.
- Keep your language simple, accessible and clear. Do not alienate your readers by using jargon and convoluted terminology.

- Remember, when drawing on the work of others, you need to reference them. WPHS journal guidelines which are available via the journal website inform you of the journal's referencing style which in this case is Harvard. Direct quotations, facts and figures, as well as ideas and theories, must be referenced. Submission of references that are inaccurate, incomplete or in the wrong style will result in a rejection of the paper. N.B Optimally and when available all references should be submitted via a separate "EndNote" file.
- Once you have finished your article ask a colleague to be a critical friend and read it to see if it is written clearly and makes sense.

### **Word length**

Most articles, including literature reviews, should be no more than 3000 words in length (excluding abstract and references). Full initial reports of original research studies may be up to 5000 words in length. Shorter reports of approximately 2500 words are appropriate for reporting interim results of studies and for discussions of topical issues. Exceptionally shorter or longer submissions may be possible following discussion and at the editor's discretion.

### **A model for structuring an academic paper for publication in WPHS**

Most authors will find the following model containing 11 steps important in the construction of the basic architecture of any scholarly paper. This model of writing an academic paper reflects the literature critiquing tool developed by Heuter and Parahoo (2012).

#### **1. Title page**

This should be provided as a separate file in the submission process. It should include the full title of the manuscript; full names of all authors, their job title, and their affiliation; and full contact details of the corresponding author (address, telephone, fax and email).

#### **2. Title of the paper**

The title of the paper should reflect the

subject clearly, accurately and succinctly. Ambiguities should be avoided and authors should not be overly indulgent in their choice of title, as this should allow the reader of the paper to make a decision to read it or not, and whether the paper applies to their field of health care practice or personal interests. For example Lattimer et al (1998) published a paper entitled "Safety and effectiveness of nurse telephone consultation in out of hour's primary care: randomised controlled trial." It is evidently clear from the title that this study pertained to the ability of nurses to give appropriate telephone advice to patients during out of hour's periods and furthermore that the study utilized a randomised controlled trial method to determine how effective and safe nurses were at giving advice.

### **3. Abstract**

This should be about 300 words for full articles, and 200-250 words for shorter papers. The abstract should provide a concise summary and overview of the main content, findings, and/or argument of the paper. Furthermore the abstract should give brief details of the background, aim, designs, results, and conclusions as appropriate and commensurate with the type of paper. This should be followed by between 3 and 6 key words designed to help readers to find the paper easily in electronic searches. Referral to the key words used in major databases (CINAHL, Medline, etc.) is advisable as this will help others in the future to find your work on citation indexes. The abstract is one of the most important parts of the paper as this gives potential readers the opportunity of continuing or not with the rest of the paper.

### **Structure of main article**

The structure and format of the main part of the paper will depend upon its nature. All references should be presented in the Harvard system. (Articles using the Vancouver system will be returned directly to the author for amendment). The following scholarly architectural aspects can be adapted for most types of paper

### **4. Literature review/Background**

The importance of the paper should be

fully justified and the context explained. Writers are expected to have undertaken a full and comprehensive review of the literature and cite the bibliographic data bases they have searched i.e. full details of the search strategy should be included. The review should identify and describe the deficits in knowledge which the paper or study being reported seeks to fill. It is important that critical reviews of the literature should cite the critical appraisal tool utilised (e.g. Parahoo 2012) and report on the strengths and weaknesses of the studies being appraised. Pertinent grey literature including relevant health care policy should be cited and acknowledged. Theoretical discussions and policy analysis must show robust, logical design with clear differentiation between opinion, evidence and interpretation.

### **5. Aims/objectives/research questions/hypotheses**

These should be fully explicit within the body of the text as this will allow the reader to contextualise the reasons why the paper has been written or the study undertaken.

### **6. Methodology or Design and method**

As appropriate and depending on the type of paper being written, the design of the study should be fully explained and should be appropriate for the stated aims. The research paradigm i.e. quantitative, qualitative or mixed method should be stated and the particular method e.g. randomised controlled trial or ethnographic investigation fully clarified. The main concepts to be measured or investigated should be defined and the methods of data collection completely described. Where appropriate, the authors should discuss if the data collection tools have been constructed for the purpose of the study being reported or if pre-existing tools have been used. It is important for authors to indicate within the paper who actually collected the data and reassure readers that bias has been controlled for. In studies being reported where there are more than one group, a description of what intervention/treatment each group received should be clearly stated. The setting where the study was carried out should be adequately described

allowing the reader to fully understand the audit trail of the facts being reported in the paper. The population from which the sample has been selected should be articulated and the precise methods of sample selection described. The author of the paper should indicate how the sample size was determined and whether a sample size calculation was undertaken. A separate section of the paper should explain the planned analyses of the dataset prior to the presentation of the results. Importantly and where appropriate, the author(s) should describe how ethical dimensions have been addressed, and how ethical approval for the study being reported was obtained.

### **7. Data analysis**

The paper should have an identifiable section pertinent to the analysis of the data (or in the case of a critical review of the literature an evaluation of the data being reported or a meta-analysis) and this should give details of the statistical data analysis packages and individual tests which were used in the study being reported. It should be made transparent in the paper how the statistical tests were applied to the data and groups being studied.

### **8. Results**

The results of the study being reported (or critical review of the literature) should be fully and clearly presented. Journal word limits often prohibit detailed and exhaustive reporting of results and authors therefore need to select appropriate tables, illustrations and charts to present the results of the data analysis. Pertinent points should be reiterated within the body of the text.

### **9. Discussion and interpretation (including limitations)**

The author should write a balanced discussion where all possible explanations for the results given and where as appropriate, the results are discussed in the context of previous studies detailed in the literature review section of the paper. All the results should be fully discussed and any limitations acknowledged and discussed. For early or developmental work the author should fully explain the next steps to be taken and give details

of the time line for the remainder of the study being reported

## 10. Conclusions and recommendations

Even for early reported work and where appropriate the author should fully justify the conclusions made and make as applicable recommendations for policy, health care practice or further research. The results or conclusions should be couched or orientated towards practice especially if the emerging or final results are generalizable.

## 11. Key points

Some authors complete their academic paper with a short list of 4-6 key points.

### The next step in your paper-writing journey

- Send the article to the editor of WHPS
- All articles are subjected to the peer review process which means they will be commented on by established experts in the field. Do not be put off when the journal sends the article back to you asking for revisions to be made. This is very common and the aim is to help you improve the article.
- Do not get too disheartened if your article is rejected. Reflect on any comments and send consider amending your paper for resubmission or perhaps consider another journal
- The publication process is designed to ensure that WPHS contains material directly or indirectly related to the health care of patients/clients that is of use and relevance to their readers. The process also aims to produce a published article of which the author can be proud.

## Conclusions

The basic architecture of any academic paper follows a number of steps designed to allow the author to tell the story of their work to potential readers and its applicability to their profession. Academic rigour in the preparation of a paper is likely to enhance its acceptability for publication. All papers for WPHS are blind peer reviewed by 2 academics

with significant publication experience. Headings the use of tables, illustrations and charts, the use of abbreviations and units and details of how to obtain permission to use other material are all detailed within the journal website. It is important for authors to declare if there is a potential conflict of interest and include any information on funding for the work being undertaken.

## Key points

1. Working Papers in The Health Sciences is a peer-reviewed e journal hosted by The University of Southampton
2. The editor of WPHS welcomes manuscripts on a wide range of relevant topics and in a variety of forms:
3. It is important to follow a systematic approach to the writing of a scholarly journal paper.
4. An assignment or a dissertation written for an undergraduate or post graduate course may be adapted into an article suitable for publication in WPHS.

## References

Dixon N (2001) Writing for publication – a guide for new authors. *Int J Qual Health Care* 13 (5) pp417-421

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