

A NURSE'S

▶ ▶ ▶ **STEP ▶ BY ▶ STEP** ▶ ▶ ▶

GUIDE TO

PUBLISHING A DISSERTATION OR DNP PROJECT

TAKING YOUR PAPER FROM **GRADUATION** TO **PUBLICATION**



KAREN ROUSH

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KAREN ROUSH, PhD, RN, FNP-BC



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Roush served for many years as Editorial Director and Clinical Managing Editor for the *American Journal of Nursing (AJN)* and continues her affiliation with the journal as News Director. In addition, she is the founder of The Scholar's Voice, which works to strengthen the voice of nursing through writing mentorship for nurses. In this capacity, Roush works with nurses in varied roles, including doctoral students, faculty members, nursing leaders, and bedside nurses. She is particularly proud of her success working with bedside nurses and other novice writers and shares their joy when they become published authors for the first time. She is an award-winning writer who has authored multiple consumer health-care books, numerous nursing articles in peer-reviewed journals, essays, and poetry. Roush has traveled to Rwanda, Uganda, and India as a nursing volunteer and taught nursing students in Ghana. She was a visiting scholar in the Department of Human Resources for Health at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. Currently she works as adjunct faculty at Pace University and The Graduate Center for the City University of New York.

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Introduction: Becoming an Author

It's time to share your work with the world.

In the Introduction of your dissertation or project paper, you told your committee why your research or project was important. You persuaded them that this was a topic or problem that we needed to pay attention to. But if only your committee members have paid attention, the impact ends there. Don't let what you've accomplished sit in the bottom of a drawer or in a fancy binder on a shelf. Make sure it gets to the people who can use it—other nurses who are struggling to solve the same problems you've addressed; clinicians who need evidence to provide the highest quality, most effective care; researchers building a body of knowledge; and nursing leaders trying to influence policy at local and national levels.

Perhaps you've presented your project and its outcomes to your colleagues and leadership in your organization. Maybe they've even taken it beyond your unit and created a facility-wide protocol based on what you did. Or you've presented your research at a conference where you shared it with a few hundred attendees. People came up to talk to you after a podium presentation or stopped by your poster.

Those presentations are important and are effective in disseminating your results to others interested in your topic. They may even result in replication of your project or collaborations with other researchers. But they don't have the reach of publication. When you publish your work in a respected journal, it has the potential to reach thousands. Your research will become part of the body of knowledge—a building block of nursing science. The project you undertook to improve the care of patients on one unit or in one facility now has the potential to improve care for an untold number of patients everywhere.

Publishing the results of your dissertation or scholarly project is the final step in your doctoral education process. No, your dissertation or project was not your life's work, but neither was it just another student exercise. It was a meaningful endeavor that asked others—participants, key stakeholders, mentors—to contribute their time and effort and expertise. You owe it to them, to future patients, and to nursing science to share what you learned through your work.

Negative findings. You should still publish your dissertation or project if your hypotheses were not proven or your project didn't result in the outcomes you hoped for. Knowing what doesn't work—and why—is important so others don't waste time and resources researching questions you've already answered or hitting the same barriers you've encountered. Unlike in the past, many journals now recognize the importance of publishing reports of negative findings.

Publication is powerful. Research enables you to influence nursing practice and patient outcomes far beyond your corner of the world. The lives of people you will never meet may be better because of your work. Publication connects you to people with similar interests, experiences, and goals. Or it ignites a curiosity in people who weren't interested before. And they go on to build on what you've contributed. It ensures that what you believe needs to be paid attention to *is* paid attention to.

Publication is also important because it strengthens the voice of nursing in the healthcare arena. It is our responsibility to make sure that nursing work—the entire breadth and depth of it—is made visible. There is still a lack of awareness of the contributions that nurses make to science, healthcare policy, clinical practice decisions, and healthcare systems design and management.

Writing a high-quality manuscript is difficult. It takes a lot of focused time and effort to take a paper from a first draft to a publishable

manuscript. And turning a long, complex dissertation or project paper into a concise, focused manuscript presents its own set of challenges. You will get frustrated along the way. When you produce just one page of decent writing after spending hours at your computer, you'll question yourself. You'll think maybe you're just not good at this writing stuff. Not true. Good writing takes critical thinking, reflection, and circling back again and again to make sure everything is connected, logical, accurate, and clearly written. All that takes time.

And you've had a lot of practice writing throughout your doctoral program. You've read tons of scholarly articles, so you are familiar with the structure, contents, and tone of research and quality improvement reports. You've critiqued research for assignments, so you know what a well-written research report requires. You have the foundational skills to do this—you just need a little guidance. This book will help you with that.

Navigating the publication process can be intimidating. Just choosing a journal to submit your work to from the hundreds of possibilities can seem daunting. Should you publish in an open access journal? And what exactly is that? How do you know if a journal is from one of those predatory publishers you've heard about? There are criteria and guidelines and forms to be filled out. There are ethical and legal considerations. And there's the online submission process to wade through.

This book is designed to guide you step-by-step through the process of rewriting your dissertation or DNP project paper into a high-quality manuscript ready to be submitted for publication and then guide you through the process of submitting it. It gives you the background information you need to confidently navigate the world of scholarly publishing.

Let's get started! It's time to become a published author!

6

PUBLICATION PRIMER

The publishing world can seem like a foreign place with its own language, rules, and road map. This chapter provides general information to help you find your way through that world on your way to becoming a published author.

Publishing has changed drastically over the past 15 years with the advent and subsequent dominance of internet access. It used to be that most nurses read articles in their own copies of journals that they received monthly or bimonthly in the mail through an individual subscription. That is not likely to be the case today. Now nurses are much more likely to access articles online through an institutional subscription—as you may do at your university or a hospital where you work.

Before, readers were limited to what was in the one or two journals they actually subscribed to, but now they go online searching by topic and can access articles across many journals. As an author, this means your work has the potential to reach far more readers who can benefit from it. But it also means you're competing with far more articles for readers' attention. Making a compelling case for the significance of your topic and writing in a clear and engaging voice are more important than ever.

There are also many more journals to choose from than in the past. There are more than 250 nursing journals listed in the International Association of Nurse Editors (INANE) journal directory. Add to that the hundreds of journals in other disciplines that nurses contribute to, such as medicine, public health, psychology, and social work.

Who's Who in Scholarly Publishing

As an author, most of your contact with the publishing world will be through journal Editors-in-Chief and editorial staff, such as the Managing Editor and content editors. There are many different editor roles in publishing, which can be confusing. Table 6.1 shows an overview of who's who and what their roles are.

TABLE 6.1 Journal Publishing Roles and Descriptions

Role	Job Description
Publisher	Responsible for overall success of a journal or a group of journals. Oversees business operations, including marketing and finances. As an author, you're unlikely to interact with the publisher.
Editorial Board	The editorial board consists of experts and leaders in the field who are invited by the Editor-in-Chief or publisher. Their role is to advise the Editor-in-Chief on journal content and policies, find and encourage authors to submit articles, and promote the journal. A board member also may be called on by the Editor-in-Chief to help with difficult decisions related to manuscript acceptance, potential conflicts of interest, and academic integrity or other ethical issues.
Editor-in-Chief	Sets the tone and editorial direction of a journal. Ensures adherence to the journal's mission and values. Responsible for budgeting and strategic planning. The Editor-in-Chief makes the ultimate decision on acceptance of your manuscript. You do not routinely communicate directly with this person other than sending a query, but in some cases the Editor-in-Chief does interact with authors. They also review manuscripts and recommend revisions. You're always welcome to contact this person with questions or queries. (In some journals this role is called simply Editor. Throughout this book I refer to them as Editor-in-Chief to differentiate them from other editorial staff.)
Managing Editor	Responsible for overseeing editorial staff, coordinating all aspects of production (including graphics, photography, or other artwork), and ensuring all production deadlines are met so that the journal publishes on time. May also do some copy editing. You may interact with the Managing Editor during the submission process. This is the person you should contact if you have questions about the editing or production process.
Associate and Other Editors	Journals may have additional content editors, such as an Associate Editor, who is responsible for content related to a specific area. There may also be a Section or Column Editor who is responsible for a particular section, one time or ongoing, or a regularly scheduled column. These editors solicit articles or work with authors to develop manuscripts for their section or column.

The following editors are the wordsmiths. They are the ones who take your manuscript and make it shine. These include Developmental Editors, Copy Editors, and Proofreaders. The extent of the edit varies among journals. Many journals just do a copy edit—fixing grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and so on, but a few also do a substantive edit of your manuscript. A substantive edit includes organizational and stylistic changes in the manuscript. (For more information on what happens in the editing process, see Chapter 10, “Getting a Decision.”)

(continues)

TABLE 6.1 Journal Publishing Roles and Descriptions (cont.)

Role	Job Description
Developmental Editor	The Developmental Editor is concerned with the substance of the manuscript. This editor is responsible for ensuring a manuscript is well organized without gaps in content and information is presented clearly and logically. The Developmental Editor rewrites, suggests rewrites, reorganizes, and adds or deletes information so that the manuscript is clear, concise, and complete. This editor may also be referred to as a Content Editor or a Substantive Editor.
Copy Editor	The Copy Editor makes sure a manuscript is consistent with accepted rules of grammar and style. This editor checks for grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, language usage, and sentence structure, making sure that a manuscript meets all the rules of the particular formatting style being used, such as APA or AMA. The Copy Editor cross-references information in the text with that in tables, figures, or illustrations and checks the citations against the reference list.
Proofreader	The Proofreader works on the manuscript after it has been edited and laid out on the page, making sure the article is perfect on the page. This person does no editing of content. Instead, the Proofreader corrects any remaining errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, graphics, or formatting. The Proofreader also makes sure the article is laid out appropriately, without awkward spacing, line lengths, or word breaks.

TIP

Do not be afraid to reach out to the Editor-in-Chief. This person is always on the lookout for good manuscripts or ideas for columns or series and is especially happy to help new authors.

Types of Journals

There are two main ways to categorize journals. The first is whether or not a journal is *peer-reviewed*. In a peer-reviewed journal, submitted manuscripts are sent to experts, who review them and make recommendations to the journal editor for revisions and whether it

should be accepted for publication. In journals that aren't peer-reviewed, the editorial staff make decisions about what articles are published in the journal independent of outside experts. In many cases, articles are written by professional writers rather than nurses or other healthcare providers. All scholarly papers—including your dissertation or project—should be published in peer-reviewed journals.

The second way is *traditional* versus *open access models*. In the traditional model, content is available only to those with a subscription to the journal or who pay a one-time fee to access an article. People may have individual subscriptions, or they may have access through an institutional subscription, such as you likely had through your college or university or may have at the hospital where you work. In an open access model, the content is freely available online to everyone. Production costs are covered by an article processing charge (APC) the author pays. Unless you have funding to pay the APC, you will likely publish using the traditional model. (See Chapter 10 for more information on open access models.)

Peer Review

All credible scholarly journals use peer review in deciding which manuscripts to publish. The purpose of peer review is twofold: to make the manuscript selection process fair and transparent, and to improve the quality of manuscripts accepted for publication.

The journal maintains a list of peer reviewers: nurses or other scholars and clinicians who have volunteered to give the journal feedback on submitted manuscripts. Reviewers have expertise in a subject area or in specific types of research or quality improvement (QI) methodologies. Reviewers do a careful read of the manuscript

and make recommendations for revision. Some of the more important characteristics they look at are these:

- Information is up-to-date.
- Information is accurate.
- Research or QI methodology is rigorous.
- Clinical practice is based on evidence and meets current standards of care.
- References are recent and primary sources.
- Information is not biased.
- Content is relevant to the journal's readers.

Reviewers also offer feedback on the writing—whether it is clear, well organized, and grammatically sound.

Some journals have a statistician as one of the reviewers on quantitative research studies. A statistician is not going to rerun statistical analyses, but this person can give the editor feedback on whether the statistical tests used were appropriate for the research question and sample and if the results are valid and reliable.

Most of the time editors send the manuscript to two or three reviewers. Reviewers are asked to complete their review within two to three weeks.

After receiving all the reviews from the reviewers, the editor considers the feedback and makes an initial decision on the manuscript. You will receive the decision along with the reviewers' recommendations. (See Chapter 9, "The Submission Process," for more information on publication decisions and responding to reviewer recommendations.)

The review process is the reason it takes months for you to hear back from a journal after submitting your manuscript. Here is a sample timeline of a manuscript's possible journey through the review process.

TABLE 6.1 Journal Review Process

Week #	Action
1	Manuscript is received.
2	Editor-in-Chief or Associate Editor reads manuscript and determines if it should be sent out for review.
3	Invitations to review are sent to three reviewers.
4	Two reviewers accept, and one declines. Invitation to review is sent to an alternate reviewer.
5	Alternate reviewer accepts.
6	One completed review is received.
7	
8	Reminders are sent to the two late reviewers.
9	
10	Second completed review is received.
11	Third completed review is received.
12	Managing Editor informs editorial staff that all reviews are completed.
13	Editor-in-Chief and Associate Editors read and discuss reviews.
14	
15	Decision is finalized. Managing Editor is informed of decision.
16	Decision is sent to author.

Blinded Versus Open Peer Review

Most nursing journals do double-blinded reviews so that neither the reviewer nor the author is known to each other. Double-blind peer review is designed to eliminate potential reviewer bias. Reviewers are expected to make recommendations based solely on content, without considering who the author is or being influenced by demographic factors. Anonymity helps ensure that your manuscript will be judged with the same standards as that of a renowned researcher or nursing leader.

Double-blind peer review doesn't always guarantee anonymity, though. The research community for a specific area of study is relatively small, and usually researchers know who else is working in the same subject area. It's not unusual for reviewers to recognize an author's work when they're reviewing a manuscript. Even though reviewers try to be objective, it's hard not to read something through the lens of the author's previous work, any personal experience the reviewer has had with the author, or the author's standing in the field.

To address issues of transparency and fairness, some journals are moving toward open peer review. In this case, the reviewers and authors are known to each other. In fact, in some cases, the names of the reviewers are published with the article. Some journals actually post the reviews, either with the reviewers' names or anonymously. The thinking is that when reviewers know their names are on reviews, they will make an extra effort to be fair and thorough.

Why is this so important? First, transparency guards against conflicts of interest influencing whether or not a manuscript is accepted. Second, there is a competitive element to the world of scholarly publication. Publishing is critical to tenure and promotion in academia. Also, you have to demonstrate a history of dissemination of research findings to acquire grant funding. So, all the tenure track

faculty out there are vying for the limited number of journal pages. Add in clinicians and nurse leaders who are also publishing, and you can see why fairness is so important.

Whether a peer review process is blinded or not, all peer reviewers are expected to maintain confidentiality for papers they review. They should not disclose pending manuscripts or discuss the quality of a particular manuscript or their recommendations with others.

Peer review has its faults, and there are many who are critical of the process. However, most authors, editors, and publishers agree that it's a necessary process that maintains integrity and quality in scholarly publishing.



Becoming a peer reviewer is a great way to provide a professional service and stay on top of what is happening in your area of practice. Also, critically evaluating other manuscripts can help you improve your own writing. And an added bonus, some journals offer continuing education credits for reviews.

Publishing Metrics

If you are pursuing a career in academia, you need to consider a journal's impact in your field and its ranking. When you go up for contract renewal and tenure review, the expectation is that you are publishing in journals that are influential in the profession or healthcare. Influence is measured by a variety of publishing metrics. The most often cited is the impact factor (IF). For a long time, the IF was the metric everyone used. However, as publishing has changed and information is shared online, other metrics have joined the fray. In many universities, though, the IF still reigns supreme.

Journals will list their IFs and other journal-level metrics on their websites, usually on the “About” page.

There are three ways of looking at the impact of publications: journal level, article level, and author level. Following are the different metrics and what they represent.

Journal-Level Metrics

Journal-level metrics quantify the influence of the overall journal in its field. The underlying assumption is that the more articles published in the journal are used by others, the more influential the journal is in advancing the science.

Impact Factor

The IF is reported by the Journal Citation Reports. It is a journal-level metric—it doesn’t measure how often individual articles in a journal are cited, only the citation rate for the journal overall. It is currently the most widely used metric.

A journal’s IF is determined by counting the number of times articles over the previous two years were cited in the current year divided by all the scholarly articles published in that journal during those two years. For example, a journal’s IF for 2019 would be the number of times articles in the journal were cited in 2017 and 2018 divided by the number of scholarly articles published in that journal during those two years.

There is also a five-year IF score, but most nursing journals currently use the two-year score.

Because primary sources are the gold standard for citing evidence, journals that publish a lot of original research are more likely to have higher IFs. The nursing journal with the highest IF in 2017 was the *International Journal of Nursing Studies* at 3.656. The medical journal with the highest IF was the *New England Journal of Medicine* at 79.258. That is quite a difference, but it's not surprising. Medical journals tend to have much higher IFs than nursing journals because they publish the types of studies and reviews, such as meta-analyses, that are cited more often. Additionally, nurses use knowledge that spans many disciplines, including social sciences, medicine, psychology, and others; therefore, they cite evidence from many sources, not just nursing journals. Medical research is mostly quantitative and focused on clinical topics, so their citations are mostly from within the profession.

Eigenfactor

The Eigenfactor is a journal-level metric similar to the IF except that it also considers where articles are cited. Citations in more prestigious (highly cited) journals are worth more than in less prestigious journals. The Eigenfactor also doesn't count citations within the same journal. It is normalized to a mean score of 1.00, making it easier to compare influence across journals.

Article-Level Metrics

Article-level metrics quantify the influence of an individual article. The underlying assumption is the same as for journal-level metrics—the more an article is used, the more influential it is in advancing the science.

PLOS

The open access publisher, Public Library of Science (PLOS), provides article-level metrics for every article it publishes across all its journals. Whenever you access an article, you see the metrics prominently displayed in the upper-right corner.

0 Save	3 Citation
8,522 View	3 Share

PLOS article-level metrics example.

Altmetrics

Altmetrics is an article-level metric recognizing that, in today's publishing world, the reach of someone's scholarship extends beyond publication in journals. Information is disseminated through social media, Wikipedia, videos, blogs, mainstream media, policy documents, practice documents, and various websites. Altmetrics is a measure of the impact an article has through these modes of publication as well as traditional journal citations. It also differs from journal-level metrics in that it starts tracking activity immediately and continually, while journal-level metrics track activity in a certain number of years prior to when the metric is reported.

The term *altmetrics* is used to describe metrics that consider these different data sources. There is also a commercial organization

named Altmetrics that aggregates data on an article and calculates an impact score for that article. It's then displayed in a multicolored circle. The colors in the circle represent different sources of attention paid to the article. Many publishers display an article's Altmetric score with the article on the journal's website. If you click the score, it takes you to the Altmetric site, where you can see the score details.



PlumX

PlumX metrics is another commercial article-level metric that includes varied sources of an article's reach. These metrics break an article's reach into five categories: Usage, Captures, Mentions, Social Media, and Citations. This metric is part of the publisher Elsevier, so if your article is published in one of its journals, it will have a PlumX score.

Author-Level Metrics

Author-level metrics quantify the influence of an individual author. Same assumption as journal- and article-level metrics—the more your work is used by others, the more influential you are in the field.

h-index

The h-index is an author-level metric that considers both productivity and influence in a straightforward approach. Your h-index is the highest number of papers (*h*) that has each been cited at least *h* times. For example, if you have six articles that have been cited at least six times and all your other articles have fewer than six citations, then your h-index is 6.

A Note About Metrics

Metrics are not infallible; unfortunately, they can be and are manipulated. As long as publication metrics are used to evaluate a scholar's influence in their field, someone will attempt to game the system. Manipulating metrics is unethical. Beware of some of the ways that journals and authors try to inflate the impact of their publication so that you don't unwittingly become part of unethical practices.

- **Overuse of self-citation.** As you develop a body of research in an area, subsequent studies build on what you learned in your previous studies. Therefore, you will legitimately need to cite your own work at times. However, excessive self-citation in an article, particularly when it's part of a pattern over multiple articles, is unacceptable. If a high percentage or a majority of citations in an article is of your own work, you need to reevaluate the reason for their inclusion. Are your articles the best evidence to support statements? Are they needed for context?

- **Salami-slicing.** Authors sometimes slice a study into too many articles, trying to increase their publication count as well as citations of their work. Every article you publish has to add substantive *new* information to the literature.
- **Review articles.** Journals may publish a review article that primarily cites articles published in that journal.
- **Editor pressure.** Unethical Editors-in-Chief may pressure authors to cite articles published in their journal with the implication that it will improve the likelihood that their manuscript will be accepted.
- **Senior faculty pressure.** Senior faculty who act as mentors or supervise junior faculty or student researchers may insist that their publications are cited in papers written by those they are mentoring or supervising.

Deciding where your manuscript will have the most impact is not just about the metrics. Your ideal reader—the one who needs and will use the information you’re sharing—may not be in the journal with the highest metrics. Go with the journal where your manuscript will be most valuable to the readers. That’s where you’ll have real impact. For more information on choosing a journal, see Chapter 9, “The Submission Process.”

Beware of Predatory Journals

Before you start looking at journals to submit to, read the section on predatory publishers in Chapter 8, “Open Access Models.”

Step-By-Step

- Start getting familiar with scholarly publishing in your area of expertise.
- What are the premier journals in your field? Do any journals pop up repeatedly in your literature searches?
- Who are the Editors-in-Chief of the journals publishing in your field?
- Find out if any of the faculty where you are a student or faculty member is an editor of a journal or on an editorial board. Reach out to them for a meeting to talk about their experience and get some words of wisdom.
- Go to the INANE Nursing Journal Directory (<https://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory/>) and find journals publishing in your field of expertise. Go to the journal websites and look at their About pages. Who are the editorial staff? Who are the editorial board members? What are the journal's metrics?
- Contact the Editor-in-Chief or Managing Editor of two or three of the journals publishing in your area of expertise and volunteer to become a manuscript reviewer.
- Establish an ORCID ID. ORCID (<https://orcid.org>) is a respected not-for-profit organization with the mission of creating a system where “all who participate in research, scholarship, and innovation are uniquely identified and connected to their contributions across disciplines, borders, and time.” Creating a unique—and forever—ID for yourself is free and can increase recognition of your work.

Resources

Altmetric: <https://www.altmetric.com>

Eigenfactor: <http://www.eigenfactor.org>

Hirsch, J. E. (2005). An index to quantify an individual's scientific research output. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 102(46), 16569–16572.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org>

PlumX: <https://plumanalytics.com/learn/about-metrics/>

SCImago Journal & Country Rank: <https://www.scimagojr.com>



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