

Key steps for new authors in sharing occupation-based practice innovations

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This year at the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Conference in Banff, Alberta, the editorial team of the *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy (CJOT)*, together with SAGE Publications, hosted two preconference workshops: 1) Using Social Media to Broaden Dissemination of Research and 2) Academic Writing for the New Author. The social media workshop provided information on how to use social media services, such as Twitter, Facebook, Google Groups and LinkedIn, to disseminate scholarly work (see Davis & Voyce, 2015, for additional information on these services). In addition, two newer online services were highlighted: 1) Kudos helps authors to promote their work through explaining, enriching and sharing it, and 2) Altmetrics tracks alternative indicators of uptake/impact through a new form of metric (see Brown, 2012, for a discussion on traditional publication metrics). This article presents five key steps and the “rules of engagement” for publishing that were outlined at the workshop for new authors.

Getting started as a new author

Writing your first article can be daunting, especially without a mentor who can teach you what is involved. Below are five key steps for occupational therapists—new to writing—who wish to disseminate their work in a peer-reviewed publication. Most of these steps are applicable to writing for a practice magazine as well.

Deciding on the topic

The topic of your first paper should be something about which you have a strong knowledge base as well as something new you want to convey to readers. Your paper must demonstrate a solid understanding of the topic by including a review of the breadth of related literature—within and outside of occupational therapy—as well as share new knowledge that has not been published previously. Do not try to write about too many aspects of your work in one paper. Once you decide what work you want to try to publish, write down your topic sentence or thesis statement.

Determining the authorship

Authorship “implies responsibility and accountability for published work” (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors [ICMJE], n.d., Section 1), and determining

authorship is a crucial step in publishing that should follow a well-informed ethical process (see Davis & Polatajko, 2015, for more details). Write down the names of individuals who have made a tangible and *intellectual* contribution to the work, as well as any individuals whom you may want as co-authors because you require their knowledge of the area—that is, those individuals whose contributions would facilitate the successful dissemination the work. The number of authors should be consistent with the breadth and depth of the topic. Individuals must only be included as authors if they meet the authorship criteria outlined by the ICMJE (n.d.): 1) “Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work,” 2) “Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content,” 3) “Final approval of the version to be published” and 4) “Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work” (Section 2). Further, the ICMJE states that all individuals who made substantial contributions to the work that is going to be published (see the first criterion) *must* be offered the opportunity to meet the obligations indicated in the other three criteria. Thus, determining authorship is often a matter of negotiation. Creating a written agreement pertaining to the authorship, including who is taking on what roles (e.g., first authorship, last authorship) and responsibilities and what the process will be if those individuals do not or are not able to fulfill those roles and responsibilities, is important in ensuring that the dissemination of that work will move forward. Once the work is completed, revisit the authorship roles and responsibilities and map out the percentage of each individual’s involvement based on writing, editing and overall intellectual contribution, to ensure that you have the correct order of authorship before you submit your work. Journal editors expect authorship to be finalized based on the ICMJE standards before a paper is submitted for review. Thus, any changes requested to the authorship following submission will be met with additional requirements to demonstrate why the changes should be made.

Identifying the audience

After deciding on your topic and authorship, you need to identify the audience for your work. Think about the “new knowledge” you want to convey and ask yourself, “Who would be interested in this topic?” and “Who should know about your work?” Think about the expertise of the authors. Are they practitioners, educators, administrators or policymakers? The

type of audience you identify will not only lead you to different types of dissemination platforms, but will also guide what you include in your paper and how you situate your work.

Choosing the dissemination platform

Once you have decided on the audience for your work, you need to identify what platform will make it available to that audience. Make a list of the journals or practice magazines (or other platforms for dissemination) that you have read pertaining to your topic and those that are cited in the literature of interest. Read their mission, vision and scope and scan each one, noting the types of papers that it publishes. If you have other requirements, such as publishing in a journal with a high impact factor, then review the metrics for that journal. Read the full author guidelines for your chosen platform before you start writing and make sure that you will be able to follow them. For instance, some journals have a very strict page or word limit and you may not be able to meet those expectations. Do not choose a journal or magazine if you will not be able to meet its restrictions, as most are not negotiable. As you may submit to only one journal at a time, it is very important to choose the “right” platform for disseminating your work. If you are not certain about your choice of platform, ask the editor for input.

Writing the article

Once you have decided on your topic, authorship, audience and platform, and have read the author guidelines as well as a few similar papers, you are ready to start writing. There are many books available that discuss scholarly writing, but these six points are helpful in starting the writing process: 1) Decide on three key messages that your findings are clearly conveying. Think about these messages as the “new knowledge” that you want to share, that is, the reason you are writing this paper. 2) Construct a clear “storyline” for your paper that fits with the mission, vision and scope of the journal or magazine. This step will help you stay on course when you are writing to convey your key messages. If aspects of your writing stray off the storyline, then they might not belong in the paper or you may have constructed the wrong storyline. 3) Create a detailed outline of your storyline that captures all sections and their key points (and reference support as required). Make sure that the order of the sections follows the storyline. 4) Form an effective introductory paragraph in about five or six sentences, introducing the topic, the rationale or gap that your work is addressing and the purpose of your paper, that is, what you will be presenting. 5) Edit your work thoroughly to ensure that it is clear of common writing problems, such as lack of clarity; inconsistency of purpose(s) and/or research question(s); poor organization or incorrect placement of information; inconsistent use of language and terms; plagiarism, especially self-plagiarism; and attribution errors. 6) Ensure that you follow the author guidelines for overall structure, style

and formatting in relation to length, headings and referencing style, as well as any reporting guideline requirements (see the EQUATOR Network’s website at:

<http://www.equator-network.org/> for information on reporting guidelines for various types of work). Authors are responsible for ensuring the correct formatting of their papers, tables and figures, and the completeness and accuracy of references prior to submission.

Understanding the “rules of engagement” in publishing

Once you have finalized your paper you are ready to submit your work. Do not expect that your work will be accepted on first review, as peer-reviewed journals’ rejection rates are typically between 40% and 60%, with some a lot lower. Just because your paper is of good quality does not mean it will be accepted, as most journals have a “cutoff” based on the number of papers they are able to publish in one year. Most importantly, be prepared for constructive critique of your work and consider this critique as an invitation to strengthen your paper, not as criticism. New authors are often overwhelmed by reviewers’ comments, but reviewers should be perceived as mentors and not adversaries. Keeping these rules of engagement in mind and following the key steps to writing will help new authors to achieve success in publishing a high quality manuscript that shares their occupation-based practice innovations.

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Questions? Contact Jane Davis, executive editor, at: cjotexeceditor@caot.ca or Helene Polatajko, editor-in-chief/scientific editor, at: hpolatajko@caot.ca

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