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Research Commentary

Now Is Your Time: Let's Start Writing—Expanding Your Reach



Lois S. Marshall, PhD, RN *

Miami, FL

I get inquiries and questions every week related to how to start writing, whether it be for a grant proposal for an evidence-based project or an article for publication and how to communicate content on a poster or varying forms of commentary related to a specific topic.

Writing is truly an art and a science. There is clearly the content which, for most of us, is the easier part. Then there is the ability to communicate that content in a manner that is congruent with the parameters set by the “place” you want to submit and/or be published.

I am a firm believer that writing “takes a village,” even if a small one, when you are first starting this process. In addition, writing a proposal is different than writing an article for publication or commentary. But, within your “village,” you can work on any and all types of writing projects.

Whether you are a new writer or a more seasoned writer, there is a place for you to expand your writing reach. I am going to recommend one way of meeting the needs of both types of writers, irrespective of the project type.

I recommend developing a “writing seminar” at your institution. It doesn't have to be budget heavy, and for that matter, it doesn't have to be time-consuming. You could use members of your nursing staff/administration to conduct and/or participate in various ways in the workshop. This could be as a volunteer, or you could even give credit toward their clinical advancement ladder. You could conduct the workshop as a 4-hour “class” with follow-up or an all-day workshop as a professional development day. This would actually be an excellent professional development day during Nurses Week.

Inquire all your nursing members who are interested in such a workshop and have them describe what they would be looking for in such a workshop. Once you have that background information, get a sense of what are the most inquired-about areas and develop the workshop around those areas. You could also make the workshop more general to any type of writing and have several different “mentors” participate to address more specific topics related to the different types of writing that individuals/groups are interested in doing.

Once you have a sense of what you generally want to cover, from general tips and strategies to follow in all types of writing to the more specific topics such as proposals for grants, articles for publication, commentaries, and so forth, meet with your nursing

leadership team and develop a plan for the writing workshop. Think about the when, where, who, what specifically, and how. From an evidence perspective, consider why this is needed for your nurses and your organization, including increasing the number of proposals and articles published to highlight in a Magnet® application. Consider the resources that are available to you from an organization perspective as well as a “mentor/expert” perspective.

Once you have “buy-in” from nursing leadership, as well as gained the interest of nurses, develop a checklist of what needs to be done in the planning stages to move the writing workshop toward implementation. I would make some of the following recommendations to you:

1. Choose several dates and review based on what else is going on at that time including clinical occurrences, i.e., census patterns, organizational deadlines, and other conferences that interested parties might be attending.
2. Determine if there is conference space in your own site or if you need to find a space. This will be based on how many people you anticipate might be interested in attending based on information forms you have sent out initially.
3. Who will be your participants and how will you reach out to them? Who will be your presenters and how will you reach out to them?
 - a. For presenters and/or “mentors/experts,” consider your nurse researcher, if you have one, to lead this effort. Do you have individuals in your organization who have written proposals for grants (these can be success and also rejected proposals—we learn from both)? Do you have individuals in your organization who have been published?
 - b. If you don't have many individuals to lead and/or function as “mentors/experts” at the workshop, consider reaching out to partner academic institutions and/or your local SIGMA chapters.
4. Determine what specifically you will cover in the workshop? What are your objectives and/or goals? Be sure to make your objectives measurable. You can base this on the previously alluded information sheets or based on anecdotal evidence you have on what participants would like to learn and refine. Do you want to have the workshop be more about general writing tips and strategies or do you want to also add content related to a specific type of writing?
5. Determine how you will conduct workshop. This will be based partially on what you want to cover and what you want to accomplish during the workshop.

* Corresponding author: Lois S. Marshall, PhD, RN, Miami, FL.
E-mail address: lsm4556@aol.com.

- a. I would recommend that you do a combination of a content-driven workshop with presentations by experts and then include an interactive component where participants can bring in the writing they are working on and get feedback from “mentors/experts.” To do this, you must know ahead of time what writing participants are working on so that you have appropriate mentors available for them to receive feedback on.
 - b. If you have limited time, you could do a half-day content-driven workshop first and then do a second half-day more interactive workshop.
6. Determine how you will evaluate the workshop. This is key to know if you were to be successful in your objectives/goals. If you were to conduct another workshop, would you need to change and/or modify anything? Do your objectives need to be more specific? Do you want to include more specific outcomes, i.e., all or 80% of participants will have submitted a piece of writing by a specified date or timeframe?

These are just some recommendations on how you might get started, with some planning and implementation tips. You can certainly come up with your own framework or use one that you are more familiar with from your own career experiences. You might

want to conduct the content-driven portion of this type of workshop as a webinar and then arrange for meeting in person for the interactive portion if that is something more feasible for your clinical organization. You might want to take up the topic of different types of writing and make them completely separate presentations.

There are so many options for providing these types of education related to writing. The key is to get nurses writing, disseminating information, research, evidence, and/or changes to policies that are “best” practices in your organization. Nurse's ability to communicate in writing, be it via posters, published articles, proposals for grants, quality-improvement projects, and/or scientific and evidenced-based research, is part of moving the nursing profession forward.

Now, it is your time. As always, I am here to assist you in any way that I can. You can contract me through my email ID provided at the end of my column. I also suggest that you look outside of your own clinical organization for assistance, again though partner clinical organizations, academic institutions, SIGMA chapters, and other professional organizations you are involved with in your career. You can do this. We as a profession can do this. Let's get started.

Don't forget to keep reading my research column for more ideas and planning for expanding your reach. Coming up next, going through the IRB process.