



GUIDANCE ON WRITING ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

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This step-by-step guide has been compiled in an attempt to encourage more readers of BJHT to write and submit articles for publication. We look forward to the influx of articles as a result!

WHY SHOULD YOU WRITE FOR A PEER-REVIEWED PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL LIKE BJHT?

Disseminating knowledge contributes towards the development of professional practice and clinically relevant research. Hand therapists are very willing to share their knowledge for practice at conferences and through informal networking. However, the exposure of such knowledge at these meetings is limited to a few and may or may not be subject to peer-review. Publication in international journals such as the *British Journal of Hand Therapy* allows knowledge to be more widely shared.

It is a common misconception that, in order to write for a journal like BJHT, authors need to have undertaken some earth-shattering research or reached the dizzy heights of completing a PhD. Writing for publication is seen as a challenge by many, especially if it is a few years since putting pen to paper or if literature-searching skills are rusty or, indeed, non-existent. However, continuing professional development, in which UK therapists have to engage if they wish to retain their registration in the future, is about developing new skills, gaining greater understanding and maintaining professional competence. Writing an article for publication is one way of achieving this. Some hand therapists already study for further degrees or to gain accreditation. Others attend post-registration education or conduct their own research to deepen understanding and develop best practice in an area of their own interest. This

work merits wider dissemination. Lastly, and by no means least, writing an article and seeing it published is immensely rewarding. It may also be useful for career progression and could be important evidence for the specialist skill and knowledge required for higher pay and job grades.

WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

Hand therapy is a broad and diverse field of practice, which draws on research from other disciplines and professions, including the basic sciences. The question of what makes a useful topic to write about is best answered by the readers. Consider what you would like to see published in the journal and which clinical questions you would like to see answered? Perhaps the questions require a properly conducted research study, but before embarking on that, it may be worthwhile to look at what has been published already. There are no simple answers to what makes a good article but if the author is really interested in the topic, that enthusiasm for the subject is more likely to be reflected.

WHAT TYPES OF ARTICLES CAN I WRITE FOR BJHT?

The majority of articles tend to be scientific articles in the form of qualitative or quantitative studies or secondary research through literature reviews. There are other contributions that are equally welcomed by the

editorial board. For example, whilst not everyone may undertake research, every hand therapist does evaluate his/her practice. You document the outcomes of surgery and therapy in case series, audit the results of new standards or service developments, compile new treatment guidelines and protocols or standardise an assessment method. These efforts need to be shared to avoid duplication of effort and to provide the rationale for future research and practice developments. Such articles are most welcome and can also include case studies. Although their appearance in the journal is more rare, this is simply a reflection of the much lower volume of submissions in this category, rather than an editorial decision.

Practising hand therapy often demands creativity. Innovations in splint designs to fit a particular patient's needs, developing new treatment modalities or new assessment techniques occur in many hand units, yet they too remain unnoticed and unknown to others. Such developments can be presented as short articles under the section 'handy hints and tips'. They should not just be descriptive, but also need to contain clinical reasoning and justification, as well as evaluation including, perhaps, modifications or improvements that have been made. These submissions should to be limited to around 1,000 words.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Firstly, the topic and type of article needs to be decided upon. Secondly, the audience, that is, the readers need to be considered. If you plan to write for BJHT, your readers will be mostly hand therapists, practising all over the world, as well as hand surgeons and students who will access the journal through their

institutional libraries. While the journal is currently called 'British', this by no means precludes international authors or readers. On the contrary, we welcome submissions from our international colleagues.

One of the most crucial elements of a good paper is that there is a clear rationale for the article and a clear purpose – that is 'where am I coming from?' and 'where do I want to get to?' A good starting point is to discuss your ideas with someone – a colleague or friend who can be supportive but critical. Set yourself a clear brief for what you want the reader to get from your proposed article – ask colleagues for their views on whether that is an important and relevant question. You are also welcome to contact the Editor to discuss your preliminary idea.

If either scientific writing or the English language are not your strong points, find someone with experience to help you.

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE THE ARTICLE?

Once you have decided on your topic and purpose, you need to consider how best to structure the article. Subheadings are always helpful for the reader as they signpost what the author intends to present next. They are also a very good way to help you write the article in small but achievable sections and overcome 'writers block'. Research articles tend to follow a very similar structure such as the IMRaD format (**I**ntroduction, **M**aterials and Methods, **R**esults and **D**iscussion). These are only broad headings and it is important that under each section all the relevant subsections are also covered. For example, under Material and Methods, sampling,

WHAT NEXT?

- discuss your ideas for an article with peers, mentor or supervisor
- set objectives and realistic timeframe
- contact the Editor to discuss ideas and get more direction on exact focus
- read through author guidelines
- do a literature search to check that your article does not duplicate previously published work
- plan the outline structure for the article
- complete first draft
- ask others to read and comment and redraft
- submit final manuscript to Editor, making sure it conforms to the author guidelines

recruitment, ethics, consent, etc, need to be described. For reporting of clinical trials, the CONSORT guidelines (*Moher et al 2001* <http://www.consort-statement.org/Statement/revisestatement.htm>) should be adhered to if possible.

For literature reviews, a similar structure can be used, except that under the Methods, the process of searching and identifying literature, criteria for selecting studies and methods of appraising need to be described. The Results section needs to contain a summary of the main studies and synthesis of findings.

All articles, whatever their topic or type, need to have an introduction, a middle and a conclusion. It is the 'middle' that is harder to define and depends on the type of article you plan to write. Perhaps the most helpful way to think about structuring the main body is to present it in chronological order, or in an order that reflects the logical progression of ideas or actions followed.

The conclusions should not leave the reader asking her/himself 'so what?' and need to bring together the main strands of the article. Drawing conclusions in a way that is supported by the

evidence presented and considering the implications for practice are also important.

HOW DO I KEEP GOING?

It is hard to keep motivated, especially when writing is challenging or when the time available is precious. However, it is an important professional activity and you should assign it a high priority. You could incorporate it into your personal development plan and discuss it with your manager at annual appraisal. If it is seen as a valued activity, you are also more likely to be supported through time and resources. Another important step is to set realistic milestones and a timeframe. This is even more effective if you have someone involved in reading and commenting on early drafts – that way you have to commit yourself to having done something by a certain deadline. Perhaps an experienced author or colleague is willing to mentor you through the process. You could invite others to help and contribute to the article as co-authors, thereby sharing the effort and the reward. Finally, choosing a topic that is of genuine interest to you and

Table 1: websites and books on writing scientific papers, editing manuscripts, and referencing

| | |
|--|---|
| USING REFERENCES IN ARTICLES | http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/ http://infoskills.port.ac.uk/refcite/refstyle.htm |
| GUIDES ON HOW TO WRITE A SCIENTIFIC PAPER | http://www.uaf.edu/csem/ashsss/paper_guidelines.html Jerosch-Herold C (1997). 'Writing for publication', <i>British Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation</i> vol.4 no.5 pp.264-267 Day RA and Gastel B (2006). <i>How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper</i> , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Hall G (1998). <i>How to write a paper, 2nd edition</i> , BMJ Publishing, London |
| WRITING PLAIN ENGLISH | http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/howto.pdf |

relevant to what you do in your practice also keeps you motivated.

WHAT CONSTITUTES 'GOOD WRITING'?

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the elements of good writing, however here are some pointers:

- avoid excess verbiage – try and keep to short, succinct messages so that the reader does not get lost
- use professional and non-jargonistic language – 'therapy makes a huge difference' may be acceptable in our verbal communication but does not read well in an article
- avoid overlong, convoluted sentences and use simple, clear English (see <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/howto.pdf>)
- use terminology judiciously and do not try and impress the reader through the use of fancy words
- use headings and subheadings to help structure and ensure a clear logical order to the article
- do not offer opinion, make sure that

factual statements are accurate and substantiated

- use references to back up your claims but do not over reference
- proofread carefully and pay attention to grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation (don't rely on the spellchecker).

Using the keywords 'scientific writing' in any general search engines will take you to many websites with useful hints and tips on writing (a few are listed in Table 1, above).

DO I NEED TO USE REFERENCES?

Most articles will require the use of references to other published literature. References serve a number of purposes: they demonstrate that the author is familiar with other work in the field and helps to place the work into a wider context; they allow the reader to distinguish between the ideas and thoughts of the author and those of others. The latter is particularly important to avoid any

accusation of plagiarism. When making factual statements, these need to be substantiated by references. This also means that the originator of that idea, study or assessment is duly acknowledged. Finally, a reference list that contains the full publication details (authors, date, journal or book title, volume, pages) also allows the reader to locate the source and follow these up in more detail.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE I SEND THE FINAL MANUSCRIPT TO THE EDITOR?

Check that the article conforms to the authors' guidelines (they can be found on the website www.hand-therapy.co.uk/journal.htm). The checklist in Appendix I is used by reviewers to provide feedback on a submitted article to the editor. It is also useful for authors to ensure that all the questions are addressed. If you are presenting a case study, it is preferable to have obtained the patient's permission to do so, even if his/her details are anonymous. Make sure that only necessary information is presented and, if using photographs, the patient should not be identifiable.

Illustrations directly reproduced from published sources, including the internet, are likely to be copyrighted, which means that you, the author, have to seek permission from the publisher to use that illustration. Such requests for permission to use an illustration need to be made in writing and confirmation from the publisher or copyright owner must be enclosed with the submitted manuscript. Producing your own drawings or photographs is preferable.

When using references, check that these

are accurate and that all citations in the text are listed in the reference list and vice versa. Make sure they are formatted to conform to the authors' guidelines (Harvard style).

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM THE REVIEW PROCESS?

Peer-reviewing means that other hand therapists and surgeons read and comment on the article and make recommendations regarding its publication. Depending on the topic of the article, the editor invites someone with relevant expertise to review it. BJHT uses a system of double-blind review, which means that the article goes to two reviewers who give their feedback independently. Any author-identifying information is removed from the article before it is sent to the reviewers; therefore the author's anonymity is preserved. This means that, in the unlikely event that the reviewer does not consider the article worthy of publication, he or she will not know who the author is. Some biomedical journals now use an 'open' review system. However, at present the BJHT editorial board feels that a blind review system is best. The reviewers then complete their reviewer forms and send them back the editor, who collates the reviewers' comments. Again the identity of the reviewer is not known to the author and reviewers' comments are anonymous. Reviewers are given approximately three to four weeks in which to complete their reviews and return their feedback to the editor. If the two reviewers' recommendations are very different, the editor may seek the opinion of a third reviewer. Once all the reviews are completed, these are sent back to the author. The 'normal' turn-round

time between submission and receipt of the editor's letter with reviewer comments is around eight weeks. The recommendations regarding publication can be as follows:

- Accept without amendments
- Accept subject to minor amendments
- Accept subject to major amendments or rewrite
- Reject, unsuitable for publication

Reviewers take their responsibility seriously, and while the author can expect rigour in the review process, they can also expect that any feedback is comprehensive and constructive. It is very rare, even for the most experienced author, that a paper is accepted without any amendments. Often these are minor and points of clarification or more detail are required to enhance the paper. It is also very rare for a paper to be rejected completely by BJHT. Authors should expect to have to make changes and, as Editor, I receive courteous e-mails from authors expressing their gratitude to the reviewers for the helpful and constructive comments that have improved the article.

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO REVIEWERS' COMMENTS?

Reviewers are required to give constructive feedback. Authors are expected not to take these personally and to respond to them in a courteous and considerate manner. Often the concerns raised by the reviewers are designed to improve the clarity of the paper and, where possible, authors should attempt to address these. While the Editor will make the final decision whether or not to publish a paper, it is also up to the authors to decide what they consider reasonable to amend. If the authors do

not agree with a reviewer's suggestion, they should state this and give reasons why not. When making amendments to an article, the authors should highlight where the changes were made and in response to which point by the reviewers. A more problematic scenario is when the reviewers consider the article 'flawed'. This can be harder to rectify and could involve further literature reviewing, collecting more data or redoing the study altogether.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY PAPER IS ACCEPTED?

When your paper is accepted for publication, it will undergo several editing processes. Firstly, the Editor will check the manuscript and the accuracy of references. You may be asked to make small changes to the sections of the manuscript. Once the final manuscript has been approved by the Editor, it will go to a professional proof reader where further small changes may be made. It then will be 'paged up', which means turning it from a word document into a portable document format (pdf) that follows the journal's house style. These 'proofs' are sent to the first author and the Editor for a final check. At this stage, no major changes can be made but any errors that may have been introduced in the process of 'paging up' can be corrected. It is the author's responsibility to check the article carefully for accuracy and to return any amendments to the Editor who also checks the proofs. Once the article is in print, you add it to your CV, open a bottle of sparkling wine and celebrate..... Oh, and start thinking about the next article to write.

Happy and successful writing!

Appendix I: checklist for reviewers and authors

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Title of article | Does it accurately reflect the content and type of article? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Is it likely to capture the reader? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are the relevant keywords by which the article may be retrieved in bibliographic database searches contained in the title and/or abstract? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Abstract | Is an abstract of no more than 250 words provided? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it provide an accurate précis of article (background, purpose, methods/materials, findings and conclusion)? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Topic | Is the topic relevant to the wider readership or very specialised? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it inform practice? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Content | Does the content cover what the author set out to do in the abstract or introduction? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it cover all the relevant literature or all pertinent issues or do these need further work? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it read well? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Is it accurate? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Presentation and layout | For research papers – does it follow the expected format (intro, lit review, methods, results, discussion and conclusion)? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it have an introduction which sets the scene or abstract | |
| | Does it have sufficient and appropriate subheadings to structure the paper | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Is its length appropriate – would it be enhanced by being longer or shorter? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are all the points presented in a clear logical order | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Evaluation and discussion | Does the paper offer a discussion of the issues or findings? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does it go beyond description and offer some analysis or evaluation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are statements and claims well substantiated? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Is there a clear theory/practice link, eg implications for practice? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| References | Are these presented in the format requested (Harvard method) and follow the journal style? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Do the references in the text and the reference list match? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are they current and up to date | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Do they support the argument and discussion sufficiently? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Illustrations and Tables | Do all the illustrations enhance the paper? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are figures and tables properly labelled and do they have an explanatory legend? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | If photos or hand-drawn diagrams are provided, are these of a suitable quality for black and white printing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Has the author indicated where figures and tables should be placed in the text? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are there any copyright issues? Has permission been sought to reproduce any figures from other published sources? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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