



The
Queen's
Nursing
Institute

Masterclass:

Writing about your research for
publication

SUMMARY

Tuesday 28 February 2023

1pm - 2pm, via Zoom

#QNIRearch



Dr Heather Bain, Assistant Head of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Highlands and Islands and Jayne Longstaff, Research and Respiratory Nurse, Oaks Healthcare, Hampshire

- Welcome to everyone.
- A brief overview of the forum: it's a national forum for community nurses who are undertaking or considering carrying out research and those keen to be more research aware.
- It aims to strengthen the capacity of community-based nursing research through peer support, mentorship, and supporting personal development and research opportunities.
- We offer monthly newsletters about research and research activities, webinars, masterclasses, this is the third of 6. There are website resources and we have a mentorship scheme, to help develop your research career.
- To sign up and/or find out more, go to: <https://qni.org.uk/nursing-in-the-community/community-nursing-research-forum/> or scan the QR code, below



Dr Heather Bain left and Jayne Longstaff, right.



The free 1-hour masterclass will outline how to write for a peer reviewed research focused journal, focusing on the audience, structure, and content of the paper.

Professor Catherine Walshe, Professor of Palliative Care at the International Observatory on End of Life Care at Lancaster University, @cewalshe, @palliativemedj, @ioelc

- My focus is on community and community care. If you cut me through like a rock, you'd find 'district nurse' throughout.
- A well conducted piece of work can have real impact. Which is why you need to think about writing for publication. Think about what you've been involved in which you could think about publishing.
- Here are my 10 top tips: there are 10 things I want you to think about when you're writing for publication. I won't be talking about editorials, they're important but not part of today's masterclass.
- **Top Top 1: Thinking about the science.** I use that word loosely but it's underpinning the work. It's the most important thing I'm going to say. It might be feel like a mountain but as Maria says in the Sound of Music: start at the beginning. That starts with planning with what you're going to do.



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- You cannot turn a sow's ear into a silk purse. If you haven't planned well you can't turn it into a great piece of writing. There's no shame saying we need help. Ask yourself who can help you design, you need to work alongside experts. Even now, 20 years later, I consult with experts. So work alongside people who really understand data and data collection. They will have the expertise to help you.
- **Top Tip 2: Understanding the positioning of your paper.** Let's face it there's an awful lot out here. My speciality is palliative care, relatively new, but even I can't keep pace, there's lots being published.
- If you're writing a paper, you have to know where it fits, an editor isn't going to be interested if it's too similar to something out there. Once you've had your good idea, delve into what's out there. You'll save a lot of time doing that at the beginning. Think about what that space is and identify that gap in knowledge. Doesn't have to be a big gap, I'll never win a nobel prize for what I do but I'm still filling a unique gap as part of a much bigger body of knowledge.
- It has to have a purpose. A gap on its own is not sufficient. It has to be really clear what



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- the paper offers and what it adds and you have to understand that yourself. Sometimes that's the hardest thing to think about because we're excited about our question and we want to understand and we forget that we have to clearly tell people what the purpose of that work is.
- Is it a different context, geography? Why is it people will want to know about what you've done?
- **Top tip 3: Understanding your audience.** There are multiple audiences for the sort of work you might want to write about. You've got to think, is this for a community nursing specific audience? Might be for a broader primary care audience? Or hospital who work in in-patient care? What type of person do I want to read this? AHP, doctors? Commissioners? Each piece will be shaped differently according to the audience. The data might be similar but the way I shape and write it and the journal I send it to you will be different.
- Google Scholar will find you research that is published virtually anywhere. The journals target particular audiences. I edit a palliative care journal, I cannot tell you how many papers are sent to us that have nothing to do with palliative care. Even it if it's a brilliant piece of research, if it doesn't fit the scope of the journal, we'll say no. you'll have then wasted your time.



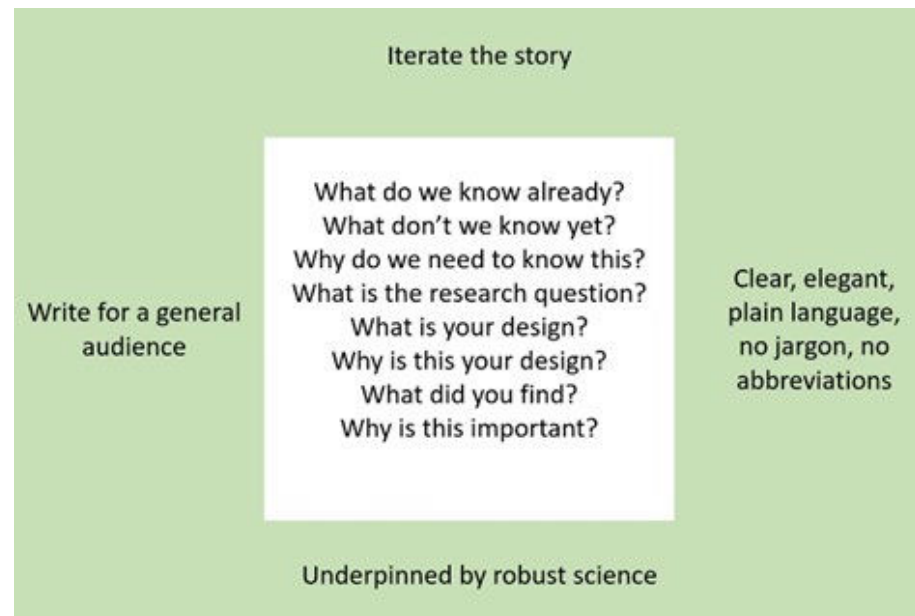
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- Think of aims and scope of journals you're sending to, make sure it meets their criteria.
- Think about what you're writing, eg for palliative care journal you don't need to define palliative care, but you might for a general medical journal.
- **Top Tip 4: Think about the narrative of what you're writing.** You've chosen the journal, know that audience, but once you start writing you have to think about your core message and what you want readers to understand from your work. You have to pace the reader through, what core findings are, what you've done etc. You've got to think about how you articulate that clearly so your readers can understand.
- The other thing is HOW you write things. When you think of nursing clinical audience we can use complex phrasing or challenging words. But no. I think the key is clear simple elegant writing. It is not about dumbing down, but being clear about messaging.
- In Albert Einstein's words: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."
- Be technical only if needed. No acronyms or abbreviations. Even for things that are obvious say for eg PC: is it personal computer? Is it primary care? Is it palliative care? Even if you've explained it right at the beginning the reader will forget what it means.



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- Also it makes it harder for people for whom English is not their first language. Make it easier to read: you want people to read your work and understand it.
- **Top Tip 5: Structuring your paper.** You have to scaffold it, it's not a blank piece of paper, you have to bring readers to structure your paper in a way that's logical and makes sense to the reader.
- If you're reporting data-based work, you will find there are guides that help you structure your paper. Equator Network: <https://www.equator-network.org/>
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Equator Network for example have guidelines and structure for reporting everything. Use them ! It's not a study design but it does tell you what to report for every sort of study. I don't write a paper without it right next to me.
- Any findings have to be based on robust research.



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- I start small and build out. A challenge is to write 80 to 90 words. 10 words per sentence. I love a table, I start with one like this (see below). Anyone can write 80 words which is the starting point of your paper. It's great for writer's block. And then you write out from that core, you have a structured plan for the whole paper, it didn't need to take an hour!
- Another good way is the pomodoro idea: a 20 minutes timed write. No looking things up, no going off on google scholar, literally write and in 20 odd minutes you will have an outline of the paper you want to write. Go off and do something else. Then come back and flesh out something. Take it in little bite-size chunks.. nothing worse than thinking you have 4000 words to write in one go.

Background	What do we know already? What <u>don't</u> we know yet? Why do we need to know this?
Research question	What is the research question (or aim/objective/hypothesis as relevant)?
Design	What is the study design? Why <u>has this been chosen</u> ? What are the epistemological, ontological and methodological underpinnings?
Population	What is the population(s) for this study (e.g. from whom you wished to draw participants). What are the inclusion and exclusion criteria?
Setting	What type of setting e.g. acute hospital, hospice, primary care, social care, Country.
Sample	How are you choosing potential participants from the population of interest? Random, purposive, convenience ...?
Recruitment	How are potential participants identified, approached, informed about the study. How do they respond, to whom? Consent procedures.
(Intervention)	What is the intervention, for an interventional study? Report according to <u>TIDIER</u> guidelines.
Data collection	What is the approach to collecting data? Why <u>has this been chosen</u> ? What measurement tools have been chosen, when <u>are they</u> being administered (use a SPIRIT figure to display this). Who is collecting the data, reflexivity?
Data analysis	What is the approach to analysing your data? Use of tools such as <u>Nvivo</u> , SPSS etc.
Ethical issues	What permissions do you have to conduct your study (research ethics committee, organisational governance approvals)? What are the ethical issues associated with conducting your study.



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- Starting with those 80 words and starting to flesh it out, by the time I've fleshed out my table, I can sit and write it all. I strongly encourage that.
- **Top Tip 6: the writing.** Your report needs to be crafted into a narrative that's clear and elegant, easy to read. That sells the story of the work you've done and writing is a craft. It's a complex craft you have to invest in.
- You have to be ruthless about your writing and let others be ruthless. Get feedback, be open to critique. Don't be afraid to be a ruthless editor of your own work. You have to practice those skills. Just like you practiced giving injections when you trained to be a nurse, you need to practice writing.



Take 500 words of your own writing.

Rewrite it so the main content is encapsulated in 100 words.

Take the 100 words of your writing and re-write it so that the main content is encapsulated in 50 words.

Rinse and repeat to learn succinct writing.

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- **Top Tip 7: Structuring of paragraphs.** There are many ways to structure a paragraph. Helpful way to do this in the table below using the 'Topic, Body, Token, Wrap' idea.
- Remember paragraphs always go forwards, they talk about new topics. Often we miss the wrap sentences and we then don't know what the point of the paragraph is.
- **Top Tip 8: being prosaic about challenges of publishing your prose.** I know we don't make it easy for you.
- Every journal has different websites, which aren't always easy to navigate. You have to read the author guidelines in detail and know what their requirements are.
- Some journals will ask you to fill in authorship statements for every author and you can't submit unless you have that ready.
- Remember that you are trying to make it as easy as as you can for the editors and reviewers.
- Remember most journals only accept 20% of papers that are sent to them.

Topic	The opening 'topic' sentence alerts readers to a change of subject and focus, and cues readers (in 'signpost' mode) about what the paragraph covers. Never links back.
Body	The main 'body' sentences give the core argument of the paragraph
Token	Tokens back up and support core arguments, sprinkled across a paragraph amongst the body sentences, at apt points
Wrap	The 'wrap' sentence serves to pull the paragraph argument together, constructive and substantive.

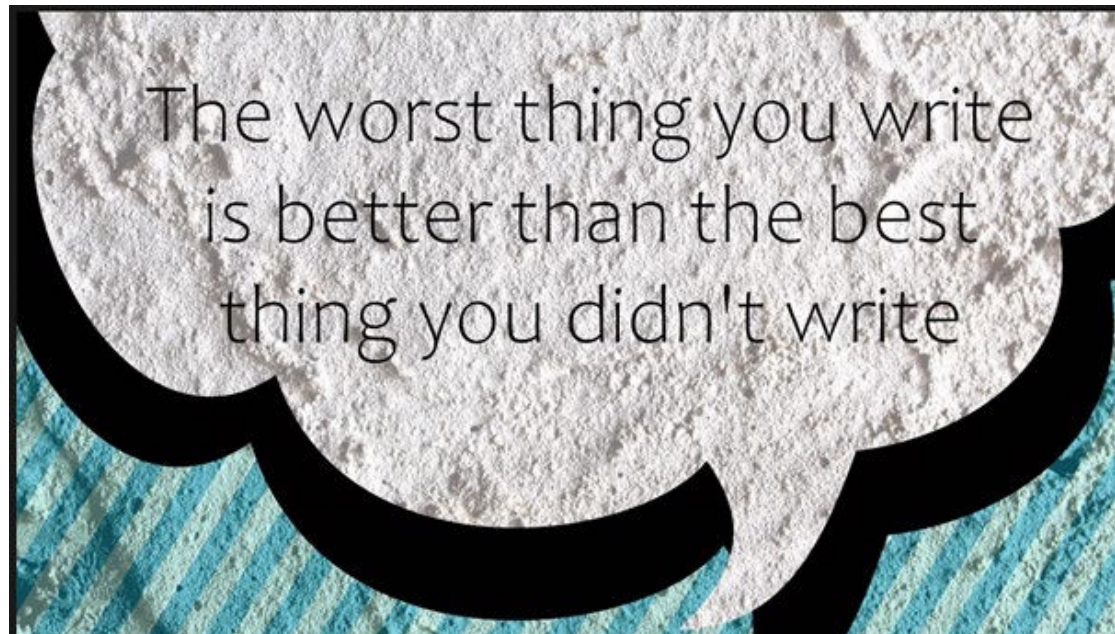
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- Top journals only accept 1% for eg BMJ. It's very common to have a desk reject, probably about 50% (when your paper is turned down by a journal, prior to them sending it out for review).
- If it goes out to review, it may go out to multiple reviews. Reviewers are not nasty people but their task is to pick up on what isn't quite right.
- **Top Tip 9: How to deal with reviewer comments.** It might feel like you need a hard hat. Review comments are great, actually what they're saying is, 'yes I'm really interested in this paper but you need to do some stuff first before you publish.'
- Don't think of it as a no, but as a 'yes BUT'. If you've written a paper that's been declined: persevere!
- The most common thing I ask people to do is take out acronyms and abbreviations.

- Respond to every suggestion!
- Reviewers will disagree – that's fine – the editors are looking for YOU to tell them your own position on the issue being debated
- If you think the reviewer has misunderstood – it may mean you have not explained well – still need to rewrite to clarify
- Always consider if the reviewer is correct or not. If they are - change. If not – respectfully refute (with justification and evidence)
- Do you get any leeway on word count – if not –stick to it even with revisions.
- If the editor asks you to do something, unless they are really off-beam (they are not infallible) – then do it!

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- **Top Tip 10: just DO IT.** There's nothing to be scared of. It's not a top secret world although it may feel like it. You must persevere.
- The community nursing message needs to get out there. We need to share the great work we do. Give it a shot, most journals will let you know if they're interested fairly quickly.
- Start by targeting a journal, read what they've published, read what others have done in that journal. How much do they spend on findings on intro etc.
- If a journal is indexed in PubMed then it's a reputable journal.
- Remember, we're not Dickens or Tolstoy. Some of my prose isn't brilliant, but it's there and people can understand it. Don't be too hung up on writing style. Hopefully that will give you confidence to get pen on paper.



Thank you to all 129 delegates who attended this Masterclass.

Next masterclasses in the series:

1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

16 March 2023, 1-2pm

Book here:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/community-nursing-bitesize-research-masterclass-16-03-23/>

3. Planning and navigating research ethical approvals

20 April 2023, 1-2pm

Book here:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/community-nursing-bitesize-research-masterclass-20-04-23/>



COMMENTS

A selection from delegates:

Brilliant session Thank you Catherine really inspired me to write. been thinking about several things for years I will now take no 10 tip JUST DO IT

Thank you this was a brilliant and really useful session!

Thank you so much, really helpful and inspiring session.
Very useful tips.

Thanks so much, that was incredibly helpful!

Excellent session - thank you very much Catherine, very inspiring!

Thank you Catherine, this has been really inspiring and will use these tips once i complete my MSc dissertation

So helpful and stimulating session. Makes me want to write and I am a reluctant writer!!

Brilliant presentation, excellent advice and informative. Thank you ever so much.

What a fantastic session, thank you!

