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## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR PUBLISHING ARTICLES - CONSIDERATION BASED ON STATEMENTS FROM AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS

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**ABSTRACT:** Publishing is a requirement for any professional who craves to be in tune with the world of science. We propose in this article do a reflection on some aspects of this theme, highlighting those that may contribute to an effective proposition to journals. We are considered key aspects in the systematization of this task order to provide more researchers are engaged in it with efficiency. We brought knowledge and strategies to widen the debate reported in the current literature. In this, we find statements of both authors and editors of journals in nursing and other areas. For this purpose we designed this article on following steps: to generate and consolidate an idea, defining partnerships, focus on the reader, choose the journal, organize your article, ethical issues and sent for publication.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Writing. Research design. Ethics, research. Research reports.

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## DESAFIOS E PERSPECTIVAS PARA A PUBLICAÇÃO DE ARTIGOS - UMA REFLEXÃO A PARTIR DE AUTORES E EDITORES

**RESUMO:** Publicar é uma exigência para qualquer profissional que almeje estar em sintonia com o mundo da ciência. Igualmente, o consumo e a produção de conhecimento são atividades inerentes ao exercício profissional. Propomos nesse artigo fazer uma reflexão sobre alguns aspectos desta temática, destacando aqueles que possam contribuir para uma eficaz investida a periódicos. São considerados aspectos fundamentais na sistematização dessa tarefa a fim de proporcionar que mais profissionais se dediquem a ela com eficiência. São trazidos para enriquecer a reflexão conhecimentos e estratégias divulgadas na literatura atual, nas quais encontramos depoimentos tanto de autores como de editores de periódicos da enfermagem e de outras áreas. Para tanto estruturamos este artigo nos seguintes passos: gerar e consolidar uma idéia, definir parcerias, focar no leitor, escolher o periódico, organizar o artigo, e observar aspectos éticos e envio à publicação.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Redação. Projetos de pesquisa. Pesquisa em enfermagem. Ética em pesquisa. Relatórios de pesquisa.

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## RETOS Y PERSPECTIVAS DE LA PUBLICACIÓN DE ARTÍCULOS - UN REFLEJO DE LOS AUTORES Y EDITORES

**RESUMEN:** La publicación es un requisito para cualquier profesional que aspira a estar en sintonía con el mundo de la ciencia. Además, las actividades de consumo y producción de conocimientos son inherentes a cualquier profesión. Nos proponemos en este artículo una reflexión sobre algunos aspectos de este tema, destacando aquellos que pueden contribuir a una investida efectiva en revistas. Se consideran aspectos clave en la sistematización de este trabajo para que un mayor número de trabajadores se dediquen a ella con eficiencia. Es presentada estrategias a enriquecer la reflexión y divulgadas en la literatura actual, con declaraciones de ambos autores y editores de revistas de enfermería y otras áreas. Para ello se diseñó este artículo en los siguientes pasos: generar y consolidar una idea, la definición de alianzas, centrarse en el lector, elegir la revista, organizar su artículo, aspectos éticos y presentación de la publicación.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Escritura. Proyectos de investigación. Investigación en enfermería. Ética en investigación. Informes de investigación.

## INTRODUCTION

The challenges to be overcome to publish in high-quality journals have been strongly present in nurses' professional life. That is so because we consider that it is not sufficient to do research, we need to produce knowledge, and good knowledge; and knowledge has to be shared, to comply with its role of leveraging nursing practices and society as a whole. In addition, publishing means respectability, scope and acceptance in the scientific community. It is a validation of the research done.

Journal editors, who also face the challenge of publishing topics of social value, express themselves as follows to help the authors: "[...] Whereas I agree that a poor presentation can sink a good study, I do not think an excellent presentation can rescue one that is fatally flawed. Nevertheless, there is a widely held suspicion that the "packaging" of a study is as important as the contents [...]"<sup>1:1666</sup>

This testimony alerts to the importance of the form and contents of the presentation. Writing is an art, it involves skill to express complex ideas in a simple and concise way. Publishing involves doing that and choosing the journal appropriately, based on its readers and specificity. Publishing means joining these two dimensions - writing, exposing original idea, in a clear and concise way, and to a specific audience.

In nursing, in turn, we should also think of the contribution to our study area. Australian authors alert that "[...] Unless nurses publish about nursing and nursing issues, no one else will and they will remain unacknowledged 'voiceless' members of the health care sector, contributing through their silence to the oppression of nursing's unique role in desired patient outcomes [...]"<sup>2:1418</sup>

Editors consider papers susceptible to frequent citations and which can positively influence their journal's impact factor,<sup>3</sup> while authors know that the reader is always a hostile public that wants to be convinced that what is written is logical, reasonable, well-justified and coherent with the research theme or problem.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in this consideration, we intend to highlight aspects that can contribute to efficacy in publication efforts. Thus, we organized our reflection in topics, which are: generating and consolidating an idea; defining authorship; the reader, choosing the journal and organizing

the paper; style, grammar and punctuation; and, finally, ethical aspects directly implied in the dissemination of knowledge, institutions, authors and their rights. At the end, important topics concerning submission for publication are discussed as highlighted in literature.

## Generating and consolidating an idea

It is fundamental for us to share our experiences and studies in order to improve our work. With a view to an actual contribution, however, it is not enough to produce ideas that, at first, seem inedited. The need to consolidate our proposals with the reality the field of knowledge production establishes is a fundamental aspect. We should remind that, in their search for scientific literature, our readers want to learn about new developments, approaches, information on aspects related to their activities,<sup>4</sup> such as studies that influence disease treatment, or that validate some method to reach a diagnosis or the severity of an illness.<sup>1</sup> Hence, who wants to publish should pay considerable attention to this aspect.

Generating an original idea is a phase that follows critical knowledge consumption about the theme, directly affecting the competent development of this conception and innovating its construction. It should be reminded that lack of new or interesting knowledge, logical and methodological errors, data analysis errors and language problems (bad writing, formulation or presentation) figure among the most frequent motives to reject articles.<sup>5</sup>

In this phase, the questions: what is known about the topic? With what scope? What subject areas have focused on this topic? What novelties have been found? What approaches have been used to develop this theme? These are relevant aspects that need to be taken into account in the production and consolidation of an idea.<sup>6</sup>

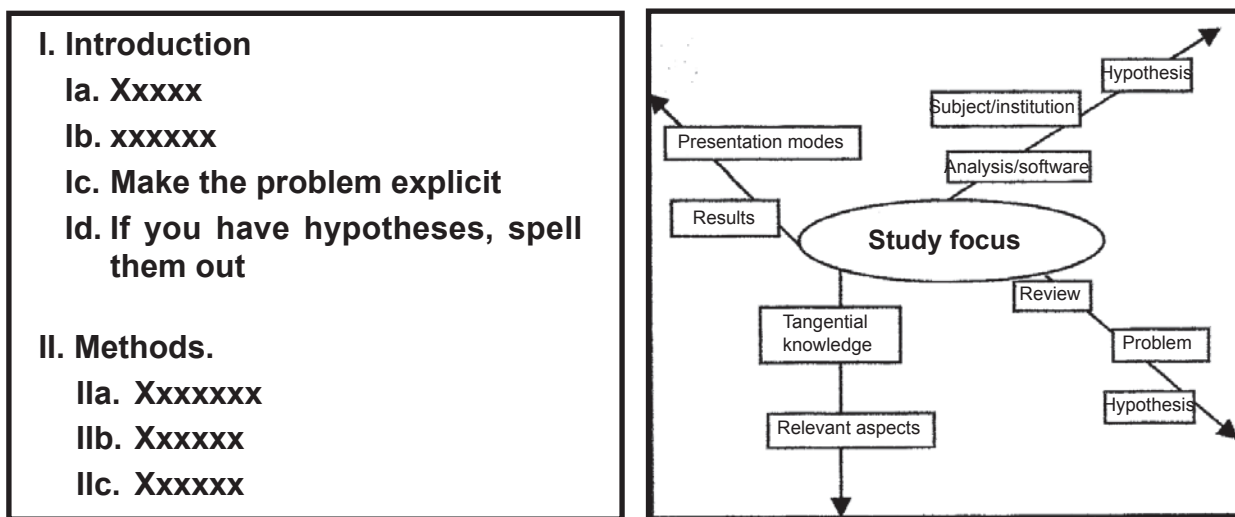
Another relevant aspect is that we tend to postpone a task in function of the difficulty to accomplish it. This can be called writer's block. In other words, as I find it difficult to write about something, I do other things I find easy and, thus, postpone the former. Writer's block is very frequent, which is why finding ways to overcome it becomes a challenge. Talking about the theme with colleagues, writing, reading more, taking into account the shifts/times we produce more easily, making a timetable to produce sub-products and

the end product are some of the strategies mentioned when producing papers. Not interrupting the process when it is flowing well, recording ideas for future transcription and discovering ways to overcome difficulties are some of the perspectives authors list.<sup>6-7</sup>

Some strategies are to write about topics you identify yourself with, read a lot, know and focus on your public. Also, conceiving a work plan will

help to outline the range of what to write about and, also, a reader to provide support can be one way of starting.<sup>2</sup>

Some people adopt a more formal logic to create, while others are more informal. Thus, besides developing the theme in topics and sub-topics, one can choose to develop it in the form of a “solar diagram”,<sup>6</sup> according to the examples in the pictures below:



Source: adapted from Sheridan; Downey<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1 - Formal and informal idea production and consolidation model**

What are the advantages of using one model or another? When used, the formal model enhances a construction that already complies with a certain journal's standards, like the construction of a text in a more traditional form that permits a more linear structure and in sequential parts. The informal model is adequate to the extent that one want to construct and develop large concepts or topics within the author's experience. It also helps to map abstractions and ideas that can be used for the same or more than one paper, depending on the range and depth the theme is treated with.

The authors who contribute with the solar diagram<sup>6</sup> also add the possibility of elaborating more than one paper on the same theme, so as to better choose the organization of the papers and contents to be further elaborated. Also, they suggest numbering the rays and sub-rays until finding a logical order as a paper construction strategy, marking the necessary transitions between one ray and the other. According to the

number of words the journal demands, a ray can be more or less detailed, permitting the elaboration of a paragraph or article section. An idea may be present in all rays, which turns it into the central theme, or may not be related to the central theme; which is when it should be eliminated. The authors also consider the possibility of assessing papers through this diagram.

To better underline the importance of this phase in the construction of scientific papers, one journal's editor-in-chief asked editors to cite the ten most common reasons for accepting and rejecting a manuscript. Among these, the editor indicates project planning as the most relevant motive, as the quality of the manuscript is directly linked with the care taken to detail it.<sup>1</sup> "Thinking through the conceptual dimensions of an article or essay before writing it helps to clarify the logic of how to proceed and present it in written form. If a manuscript is badly conceptualized, then it is unlikely to be published".<sup>8:427</sup>

## The definition of authorship

The doubt about whether to write along or in cooperation with other people comes with others: are the collaborator's ideas and experience of interest to the journal? Does the collaborator have sufficient knowledge, distinguished from one's own, to improve the study? Does the collaborator have the time needed for the project? Is (s) he familiar with what the process of writing the paper involves?<sup>7</sup>

Agreeing on a task division according to skills, expectations and contribution – who will do the literature review, write the method, elaborate the concepts, how the results will be presented, what aspects need to be highlighted in the analysis – are some of the phases that need to be covered. Hence, agreement on these issues is fundamental. These aspects, in turn, will influence the definition of authorships and any products deriving from this study, which can vary depending on its complexity. At the start of the process, it is important to conciliate what publications can derive from the study results and put any agreement down in writing, if necessary.

Cooperation among researchers is recommendable. Collaboration between clinical nurses and researchers enhances professional development.<sup>2</sup> But whom can we consider an author? Journal publication standards in general, including the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, unanimously affirm people who substantially contributed to the research as authors.<sup>9</sup> It is not sufficient to develop a technique, hold interviews or collect data. Cooperation to the ideas, analyses and project conception is needed, besides collaboration with the final version.<sup>7,9</sup> Normally, the person who planned the study, worked on data collection and analysis and wrote the paper should be the primary author.<sup>4,9-10</sup> What generally defines the order of the authors is the level of conceptual and technical participation in the study and manuscript.

## The reader, the journal and the organization of the paper

The paper's potential reader is the target audience, determined by the specialty of the theme addressed. Usually, the audience directs the choice of the journal, so as to reach a "market" or "specialty". Hence, one task that demands the researcher's dedication is the search for journals that publish on the theme and the analysis of the

disseminated knowledge level. This analysis also involves the paper's differential, what it adds and/or innovates on previous publications. The challenge is to work with new approaches to the theme, reaching needs that have not been addressed yet in the knowledge area.

One editor's statement on nursing readers should be underlined. "[...] Unfortunately, we know from a wealth of studies on implementing evidence-based guidelines and other research material that most practising nurses: do not read research reports, do not read nursing journals regularly, are 'turned off' when they try to read them, find the language too complicated and full of jargon, do not understand statistics because they are not used to them, do not understand the majority of these papers, cannot evaluate the quality of the research [...]"<sup>10:7</sup> Unfortunately, we do not always read research to update our knowledge that guides our practices. This assertion was raised to provoke a stand and, if possible, more than that, light a spark of challenge to consume and produce research and publication that contribute to change positions like that of the editor cited.

Authors highlight that the nurse, "the reader that I always visualize is the one, often like myself, coming home in the middle hours of the evening after a day of decision making and dealing with routines and conflicts, drained and weary. You must entice these readers, catch their attentions and hold their interest, if you want to get your message across".<sup>6:61</sup>

Consequently, if we want to disseminate knowledge in our professional area, keeping these aspects in mind when writing and "polishing" the text, so as to make it clear, concise and interesting, are skills authors need to develop. Likewise, we can find means of dissemination among our peers, such as short reports, oral dissemination, on-line dissemination, facilitating colleagues' access to the knowledge produced.

## The journal

A bad choice can result in publication delays, lack of adequate assessment or of proper publicity, making your paper hardly read. To check whether a journal represents a possibility, try to find out its description, aim and scope, through its website.<sup>7</sup>

Other factors can be considered in this choice, including publication speed (see periodicity), print quality (if you have photographs to publish), and the possibility of acceptance.



The journal's prestige\* is relevant, as having a paper published in a less prestigious journal is not acknowledged in the same way as another in a more prestigious one. Few publications in prestigious journals can impress researchers more than many in more popular journals, which is not uncommon in selection tests<sup>7</sup> for example. High-quality science, however, can also appear in journals with different impact factors.<sup>11</sup>

Some authors<sup>6</sup> mention the possibility of sending a query letter to journal editors, describing what you intend to develop and how you think this theme would be of interest to that journal's readers and showing how the journal can take interest in publishing your paper.

It is understandable that biomedical editors choose manuscripts corresponding to a journal's mission statement, which includes an incorporated code of values and beliefs.<sup>3,8</sup> Hence, it is of no use to submit a qualitative research paper to a journal that publishes quantitative or structured qualitative research. Observing these characteristics is part of the pertinent assessment of the journal's adequacy to your paper.

### Organization of the paper

In a paper, the title has to be coherent with the type of journal you wish to publish in, i.e. the more specialized, the more specific the title should be.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if you want to publish in the journal *Infection Control Today*, a good title could be "The skin is the source – recent data and best practices in skin antiseptics", or, if the journal were *Oncology Nursing Forum*, the title could be "Fatigue and other variables during adjuvant chemotherapy for colon and rectal cancer". Besides coherent with the journal, the title should be as short as possible to adequately describe the paper contents.<sup>7</sup> It should be reminded that it guided library searches; it is the publication's most consulted part, attracts the reader's attention and indicates what the paper is about.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the title, the abstract will be published separately and should be autonomous. Consequently, when the abstract does not give a good impression of the research, reading the paper may be condemned to failure.<sup>7</sup> It should also be highlighted that abstract styles vary according to

journal standards, but that the first 40 to 50 words are accessed first. This first part should be carefully written to introduce a clear and sensitive idea of the paper contents.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the keywords, considerable confusion exists on how to choose them. That is so because, through the use of scientific descriptors for the better location of publications, these conceptions have turned into synonyms, in view of the search to grant themes and their publication means, the journals, greater visibility.

The choice of keywords or descriptors is fundamental for a database search. People interested in the paper can only access it if the keywords are scientific descriptors and translate essential aspects of the paper. They can be selected in view of keywords per clients of your article (patient, client group, children, professionals, elderly), application site (community, emergency unit, home), paper type (instrument validation, literature review, conceptual analysis), methodological design (randomized and controlled clinical trial, discourse analysis, questionnaire), and professional group involved (nurses, nursing staff in general, midwives, nurse-midwives).<sup>10</sup> International journals request more than five keywords, and sometimes up to ten. That is so because they make it easier for researchers to find the scientific papers in the databases, increasing the paper's access and citations and improving the journal's impact factor.

Usually, the structure of a scientific paper follows this logic: Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRD), to be defined through these questions: what is the research problem? The answer is the introduction. How was this problem studied? The answer is the methods section. What were the results? What do they mean? The answer is the discussion.<sup>7</sup> As a result of its greater tradition in qualitative research, Brazilian nursing faces some difficulty with this structure. In some qualitative studies, results and analyses can be distinguished. In others, however, this is not possible, given the researcher's inferential process in the results. In these cases, qualitative journals are the most indicated.

Editors' experience recommends observing, in the selected journal, how paragraphs are struc-

\* The indices published in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) determine journals' Impact Factor. The Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), part of the Thomson Corporation, is responsible for the Impact Factor. ISI lists 9,200 journals in 256 subjects, in the fields of sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, in 45 languages ([www.isiknowledge.com](http://www.isiknowledge.com)).

tured, and the size of different sections, what types of subtitles can be included, how many pictures and charts can be presented, and which are the common types.<sup>7</sup> The judicious use of tables and graphs supposes that results are organized, offering a clearer understanding than if the text format were adopted. Thus, it seems obvious that what is placed in the table/graph is not in the text and vice-versa. Elaborating tables and graphs can be harder than improving the written text but, if well done, can enhance the paper's quality. The opposite is also true. Therefore, drafting presentation modes to make the theme clearly communicated, concise and with coherence among the sections, is a good tip.<sup>10</sup> A more structured or informal organization will depend on the theme, project and journal. Writing demands effort and one of them is to arrange and rearrange the sections, until the author is satisfied.

### *Style, grammar and punctuation*

Although attentive observation of journal standards is an obligatory condition, it is not always sufficient to cover the doubts the researcher wants to clarify. One example is the assessment of whether the paper can be of interest to other authors and, if yes, from which countries. Another is to seek (and find) pertinent literature in the journal's language. Thus, even if a paper can be relevant to some countries of different cultures, perhaps the best use can be achieved if it is published in its own culture.<sup>8</sup>

The same authors call attention to the researchers' use of available instruments, but which are not necessarily appropriate for application in other cultures, especially when measuring behavioral issues, beliefs and values. This is perhaps one of the main limitations for knowledge production in non-English speaking countries, because not many validated instruments are available yet. On the other hand, we do have many weakly designed and hardly strict studies, due to the bad use of instruments from other cultures. Also, we have not looked into these issues sufficiently, so as to create our own data collection instruments. A critical study design is essential with a view to overcoming these situations.

Complete, clear and transparent reports are as fundamental for readers to judge the reliability and utility of health research<sup>12-13</sup> as emphasis on its novelty, exactness and pertinence.<sup>1</sup> Hence, using language appropriate to the theme's com-

plexity, showing mastery of the subject (range and depth) is a requirement, just like the - hostile - readers' need to understand what is wanted, and preferably without great effort.<sup>2</sup> In scientific papers, our papers tend to be overly refined, while they should actually be more direct. Authors recommend the active voice and even the use of the first person, if that is the case, with a view to achieving more fluid reading. What will grant the text due depth is the selection of what to write, more than how to write it. Likewise, merely showing knowledge is not sufficient, like when using a graduate course conclusion paper for publication for example. That is so because this type of study demands knowledge on the object above all, with authors' need to advance on this knowledge in this particular case, showing nuances that have not been considered/published<sup>8</sup> yet, so as to enhance their interest.

Another great challenge we face as Latin American authors, with a considerable number of international journals, assessed as the best in our knowledge area, is to publish in English. Actually, this starts another task, perhaps as exhaustive as everything discussed so far. Initially, familiarity with this language in our specific professional area is a step that needs to be overcome. Perhaps one good measure is, when reading papers in English, to write down expressions, creating a glossary for personal use to help when writing in English.

Especially if your native language is not the same as the journal's, what phrases can you use in your work? Besides, can the use of previously published studies help to find appropriate models for your presentation?<sup>7</sup>

Writing in English, even if one is not certain, can still be better than writing a translator. Various experiences have shown to be insufficient, even when hiring a translator who is familiar with the area or language. We frequently receive answers like: "although I applaud the author(s) for submitting this manuscript it needs major work by an Editor. Although (nome da revista) has an international readership the articles must be clearly and logically written in English. Once rewritten the true merits of the manuscript can be determined", or even "the grammar in this article was too poor to allow me to understand what the author was attempting to tell me" (response authors received in reaction to a paper submitted to an international journal). International editors recommend finding help from editors with more

advanced knowledge on the English language, who can truly perform a critical analysis before the manuscript is submitted to the journal.<sup>7-8</sup> It should be reminded that the required quality standards apply to all manuscripts and that, in a journal with high demand levels, a good presentation can make a difference among other studies of a comparable scientific caliber.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ethical aspects and submission for publication**

In view of the broad discussion on ethical aspects connected with authorship, data replication, originality of the paper<sup>6,10,13</sup> and ethics committees and their requirements,<sup>14</sup> we will focus on issues related to author and publication rights, as well as conflicts of interest, as these also seem to be polemic and less addressed. There seems to be some confusion between authors' and publication rights. In general, these rights are related to the way in which the material can be used and disseminated. A difference exists between authors' rights and copyrights. The former focuses on the person who holds the right, while the latter focuses on the object the right refers to, the work.<sup>5</sup> The fundamental scope of authors' rights is to protect the creator, while copyright protects the work itself, i.e. the product, emphasizing the economic branch, the exploration of the paper's ownership through the right to reproduction. When transferring copyright, the owner of the author's rights will put the work at the public's disposal, in the form, place and for as long as (s)he wants, either against payment or for free. In other words, except copyright, the authors are entitled to other property rights related to the manuscript.<sup>10</sup> To reproduce any text, figure, table or illustration from the manuscript in future manuscripts, however, the authors should ask permission to the journal, which holds the copyright (for a certain time period).<sup>10</sup>

Other aspects the authors need to know well are conflicts of interest.<sup>10,13</sup> These occur when research is done upon some company or institution's request, or even while working for an institution. To give an example, a nurse who collects data at the institution (s)he works should organize it so that no conflict of interest is provoked by doing the study him/herself, which could cause bias in data collection. At the same time, if any public entity or another institutional sphere provides funding, this should be cited/acknowledged. What is im-

portant in these cases is that research objectivity is not infringed upon.<sup>7,13</sup> Therefore, when starting a study, it is fundamental to obtain all necessary authorizations, including authorization from the institution to disseminate its name in publications, if that is the case. Each journal has its own form for these aspects, which vary according to the editorial policy. Rules for citing texts should also be checked as, depending on the number of words, authorization from the author of the cited text may be required.

### **IMPORTANT TOPICS IN MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION**

Reviewing a text as many times as needed is one measure to write well, i.e. writing well can partially depend on reviewing well.<sup>7,15</sup> Elaborating between six and ten drafts to write a good manuscript is quite normal.<sup>8</sup> For every hour a reviewer or editor works, the author works seven, besides the fact that, normally, the editor will tend to defend the reviewer's argument.<sup>11</sup>

Care with citations is one aspect the reviewers assess, checking for coherence between the citations and references, as well as clear writing, including parts that shift between and link up ideas, helping readers to anticipate conclusions.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it should be checked whether there is any information that is not essential, if logic and coherence exist between the parts, if the information is exact, if there are no unnecessary pictures and charts and, finally, if the standards the journal adopts were fully complied with.

For electronic submission, some journals request a cover letter. This offers an opportunity for authors to present themselves and the manuscript, so as to reinforce its most original aspects, theoretical background, and the range of studies selected to construct the research process. In the same letter, the authors can also declare conflicts of interest, like with journal editors, staff or even reviewers.<sup>9</sup>

A query letter can be one way to present yourself and your manuscript to an editor, and can also give the editor an example of how you think and write. One benefit we consider is that, in case you have not adapted your paper to a specific journal's standards, you can adapt it to the journal's needs and the editor's suggestions, if (s) he is interested. You can also send various letters to different editors, so as to invest in a journal that is truly interested in your theme, saving your time



and investing it better when writing. Consulting a journal on-line can enhance the use of your publication by 90% in comparison with other papers submitted to the same journal.<sup>6,8</sup>

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Publishing in highly considered and indexed journals, mainly international ones, represents a tough challenge for most nursing researchers, mainly in Latin America. The aspects highlighted here do not exhaust authors' due considerations and care in elaborating and submitting papers to journals.

Having a paper accepted in a renowned and important nursing journal is a conquest that consolidates the dissemination of the knowledge produced, and also puts a crown on its possible application in professional practice.

Therefore, the authors should assume the responsibility and commitment to constantly consume what is published in their specific area, besides maintaining general knowledge about what has been published about nursing. This creates the possibility of constant familiarity with what is produced and understanding of the context and the broad picture of the knowledge produced.

It is highlighted that the phases presented here, i.e. the production and consolidation of an idea, the definition of partnerships, focus on the reader, the choice of the journal, organization of the paper and ethical aspects do not necessarily happen in that order. These are complementary phases in the knowledge production process and can be recovered during this process, until the authors - who proposed the manuscript - feel sufficiently satisfied, based on their critical reference framework, and finally submit it for publication.

Thus, we hope to contribute to the publication of high-quality papers as, for any professional who aims to be in tune with the world of science, publishing is a requirement. It does demand specific skills and knowledge though, which can be enhanced in research groups, through contact with other researchers, as reviewers and *ad hoc* evaluators, among other situations.

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