**Introduction to Journal Publishing: Why is this important to those working with adolescents?**

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**Abstract**

Those working with teens through various community-based programs are encouraged to disseminate the results of their studies and lessons learned through publication in peer-reviewed journals. It is important that everyone working with young people have access to the most current research and lessons learned from projects in the field. By doing so, we can continuously improve the quality and impact of our work and make the most of limited funding. A high level of competence in publishing is not shared by everyone working with adolescent populations, and there are individuals in the field who think they do not possess the skills to publish their findings. Learning to disseminate evaluation results as well as lessons learned is important for those who work with adolescents. The writing and publication process can be challenging, but it is a consequential tool that shares knowledge with others in the field. This paper provides some accepted tips and strategies to publishing in peer-reviewed journals and encourages the dissemination of knowledge intended to improve the lives of America’s adolescents.

**Keywords:** publishing, adolescents, prevention programs, public health, dissemination

# Introduction

Today’s adolescents may face many challenges to their well-being including issues such as teenage pregnancy,1 trauma informed care,2 cross-disciplinary issues such as reproductive coercion,3 illicit drug use,4 as well as other social determinants of health.5 Sharing information through publications is essential to those who work in the field with adolescents. By disseminating findings based on program experiences, case studies and other types of research, program managers can find connections and already proven approaches to strengthen their programs, and in so doing reduce time, energy and funds needed.

Competitors awarded government funding as well as others working in the field have a social obligation to share their findings to further extend limited resources so that youth and families across the country can benefit from what is learned. For agencies that work with adolescents, the benefits of publishing can be rewarding for several reasons, not least of which is increased credibility. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals can also be augmented to reach a much wider audience through social media and other outlets.

Some readers may be grantees with federal funding and others may not have current or past federal funding but share the experience of working with adolescents in a variety of capacities. Many professionals who work with adolescents may not have had experience tailoring their writing for publication. However, it is clear many of those in the field have learned a tremendous amount that would be helpful to others. In this time of competitive resources, it is imperative that those who can publish, from either evaluation efforts or lessons learned during program implementation, do so to enhance interventions to address the needs of today’s youth.

**Pearls of Wisdom about the Writing Process**

Writing is a process that can be daunting, but it can also be rewarding and satisfying.6 It is important to find what methods work for you. Some experts suggest writing at least a certain number of words a day, while others suggest setting aside specific days, or trying to find the best time of day to write. Truly, there is no right or wrong way to approach the writing process. However, it is important that if you intend to write something, you spend time writing! As with any skill, it takes effort and practice and it does not happen on its own.

Many successful authors find the use of a team approach helpful. Look to those on your projects and/or consider working with a faculty member at a university or college when forming a team (e.g., departments of education, nursing, psychology, health education, sociology, public health, medicine, etc.). Decide up front who will be the lead (first author) and who will be second, third, and so on. Consider taking turns with the lead role on different papers to distribute the workload. This approach may also result in more manuscripts. Each member of the team should contribute to the development of the paper. This not only divides the workload but can make the process much more enjoyable!

It is also important to consider budgeting for publication costs, as there can be fees or charges for editing and publishing your paper. You may publish in journals that do not charge for publication, but it is always good to consider adding some funds to your budget in case a journal charges per page or if there is a processing charge (e.g., Open Access). Remember, the first journal you submit your manuscript to may not be the right home for your paper, so be prepared to move on to another journal, and know the costs may vary from journal to journal.

It helps to have a sense of what is published to better understand where your work fits within the field. Some articles fill the gaps on certain topics, while others enhance already published information, and provide further evidence for additional support. In any case, the work you are doing is essential to augment the knowledge within and across the field.

Another thing to remember, once you have a paper ready for submission to a peer-reviewed journal is the number of revisions you will likely be asked to make. Few articles are accepted on the first attempt. It can be disheartening, but it is part of the submission process. By persevering and incorporating comments provided by reviewers, you will strengthen your work and can then resubmit.7 Sometimes, rejection simply means the paper is better suited for a different journal and you need to consider revising and submitting elsewhere. The bottom line is that you should not give up.

**Getting Started**

The first step is to decide if there is an idea from your work or the findings from your program that is “paper worthy.” The paper you create should not be an overview of your program. The purpose of the paper is to tell others the lessons you learned or communicate key information discovered while implementing the program. If you have more than one idea, it is best to consider writing multiple papers rather than trying to put everything into one paper. If there are three significant ideas, that should turn into three papers. There are different types of papers and all do not have to be results from a rigorous evaluation study. For example, implementation evaluation findings and lessons learned, commentaries from the field, opinion pieces, and papers to summarize outcome evaluation findings are all important topics. Consider the following findings and follow up questions as you narrow your focus for your paper as examples:

* You had better attendance in your after-school program on a certain day of the week:
* Did you use performance measures data to follow attendance?
* Was the facilitator/teacher/mentor a different person on different days?
* The cost of the program to administer was less than you anticipated:
* What was the cost per participant?
* What made the difference in the actual cost versus what you anticipated?
* You had better outcomes with less teens reporting sexual activity in your program than reported in other similar programs:
* How did you measure your outcomes?
* Was your target population the same as other studies?

Limiting the scope of the topic allows you to focus the writing and provide supporting detail to fully develop the topic. Writing for peer-reviewed journals requires effective sentence construction and succinct language usage. You should state the objective, provide relevant detail, and implications for practice. At this stage, when working through your drafts, you may want to enlist the assistance of an editor to help keep the paper tightly crafted.

**Target audience**

As you begin the writing process, you must determine who your target audience is or what populations you intend to reach (e.g., community health, teen pregnancy prevention, etc.). This will help you draft the paper as well as make decisions about where you hope to publish.

**Internal Review Board (IRB)**

Although not a part of the writing process directly, if your paper discusses the results of a primary research study or case study you will need to submit your proposal to an Internal Review Board (IRB) for approval. You must have this approval before your study can start. In your paper, this IRB approval will need to be identified within the text.

**Journal selection**

Defining the issues to present and determining the target audience will provide a framework to begin the search for the journal that best fits your work. One good place to start is by looking at the reference list of published articles in your field. Another excellent tool is to use the free, online tool, JANE. This stands for “Journal/Author Name Estimator”. JANE relies on the information found in PubMed and compares journals that are both traditional subscription as well as open access format. How it works is that you enter the title and/or abstract of the paper in the box (found on the JANE site) and click “Find Articles”. JANE will then compare your information entered to millions of documents in PubMed to find the best match as far as journals, author or articles. JANE lists journals that are high quality and currently indexed in MEDLINE, and open access journals approved by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). To access JANE, you can use this link: jane.biosemantics.org.

Some other questions to consider when deciding on a journal include:

* Where are others who are interested in your topics publishing?
* Do you see a pattern of published articles in certain journals?
* What journals do you read?
* How often is a journal published and is there an affiliation attached to the publication?
* Are you interested in publishing in a journal with a high impact factor, (this is a mathematical calculation of the journal’s projected reach to the intended audience)?
* Do you have a budget to publish in an open access journal that charges a fee?

Identifying the journal you intend to submit to before you begin writing can be very helpful as well. Each journal has specific page lengths, font size, style criteria (e.g., APA, AMA) and other writing practices.8 These specifications can be found on the journal’s website and are listed as “author guidelines.” As a step in determining if a journal is a good fit, it is important to identify if the journal publishes similar work and reaches an audience that would be most interested in your findings. Once you identify the journal, consider sending a query to the editor (if appropriate) for their opinion on the paper and its acceptability to the journal.

**Funding Acknowledgement Disclaimer Statement**

It is very important to “give credit where credit is due.” If you have funding, you need to cite this in your work. Funding itself adds to the credibility of your work as well as to the transparency of all your affiliations. It is important to acknowledge any conflict of interest, if such should exist, with any of the authors on the paper. In addition, you may need to include a disclaimer that the paper reflects the views of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the funder especially if your funder is the federal or a state government.

**Submission of Paper to Journal and Peer-Review Process**

After the paper is written and submitted, the peer-review process begins. Most editors will review the paper and determine if it is appropriate for the journal’s audience. If it is, the editor forwards the manuscript to 2-4 reviewers who read the work and provide comments. Reviewers’ feedback can be challenging to hear. Keep in mind the reviewers are trying to make the paper stronger and more effective and their comments should not be taken personally. This is sometimes easier said than done. However, the more often you submit work, the easier it becomes to receive constructive feedback. There is no right or wrong way to incorporate revisions suggested by the reviewers, but a common approach is to create a table with rows and columns. The rows identify the area in the paper that is being revised. The columns contain the peer-reviewer’s comments and a description of how you addressed the suggested changes in your paper.

**Abstracts**

The abstract is a critical piece of your paper. It is the first thing that captures the attention of editors and peer reviewers when the paper is submitted. An abstract is an original and impactful statement that describes the paper. Its components vary depending on the discipline (retrieved from <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/abstracts/>).9

There are two types of abstracts: descriptive and informative. Descriptive abstracts are often very short (around 150 words or less) and they make no judgments about the work, nor do they provide results or conclusions. Most abstracts are informative in nature and more information is provided in this type of abstract. Informative abstracts usually contain 250-300 words and provide a more inclusive summary of the paper.

**Key Words**

Many journals ask the author to provide a list of “key words” that others can use to search for the article once the paper is published. It is important to review each journal’s requirements for key words. These requirements provide guidance for what types of key words are acceptable (e.g., how many words they want, whether single words or phrases are accepted). To identify key words, you should attempt to capture what is essential about your article. For example, if your article is on teen pregnancy prevention and after school programs, you might choose to use “teen pregnancy,” “after school programs,” and “pregnancy interventions” as key phrases and “teens,” “pregnancy,” and “school” as key words.

The key words are used when you do a search in bibliographic database search engines (e.g., CINAHL, PUBMED). Enter the relevant key words into the respective database search engine(s) and this will provide a list of articles published in the field that are associated with these words.

**What is a journal’s impact factor?**

Impact factor (IF) is a measure of how many times the average article in a journal has been cited over a two-year period. It provides the relative importance, or rank, of a given journal.10 This measure is often considered a proxy for the reach the journal has with its intended audience. The impact factor of a journal has no bearing on the scientific or practical worth of an individual article, rather it is a tool you might use to help gauge the journal’s relative influence in the field.

**Open Access**

The internet has brought about significant changes to publishing in peer-reviewed journals.11 Prior to the internet, peer-reviewed articles were only found in print. Libraries and individuals had to subscribe to the specific journal for access. Today, many journals offer both online and print versions and some may publish papers online ahead of print, but not all journals found online are considered open access.11 The main difference between an online version of a journal and an open access journal is the subscription fee process. Open access journals do not charge a subscription fee to financially support the journal, while online and print journals do charge subscription fees. Often in open access, the author pays a fee to the publisher when the paper is accepted, thereby providing income for the journal. Importantly, open access journals offer the same rigor in the peer-review process and indexing as with traditional print journals.11, 12

**Predatory Online Publishing**

With advancements in online publishing came the growth of a negative phenomenon, predatory publishing and journals.11 Predatory journals and publishers have questionable practices and their primary objective is to collect a fee from authors for publishing their papers. They provide a fast peer-review and publication process. Often the peer-review process is subpar or even non-existent.11 They may claim their articles are indexed in reputable bibliographic databases such as PubMed or CINAHL, when in truth, they are not.11 In addition, predatory journals often have an inordinately wide scope or combine disparate fields in their titles, thus allowing for a broad range of papers and increased revenue from authors.12

The term “predatory open access” was first introduced by Jeffrey Beall in 2011. He created a list of predatory publishers. Unfortunately, this list was forcibly removed from the internet and an online replacement that is free to access has not been recreated.13 If you decide to publish in an open access journal, a good way to verify reputability is through the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). DOAJ is a search service for open access peer-reviewed journals.14

Another way to distinguish between a reputable open access journal and a predatory publisher is to identify whether the journal participates in, or is a member of, a customary organization such as “Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) or the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)” (pg. 2221).12 It is important for authors to research journals thoroughly before submitting their papers to prevent falling prey to a predatory online journal.

**Implications for Practice**

Generating ideas and being innovative is important in creating programs that can be impactful, efficient, cost-effective, and sustainable. Sharing what you learn informs others who work with adolescents in different programs.. You might think what you have to offer is insignificant or not important, but we need to change this mindset. For example, if your program found several practical ways to improve recruitment and retention in your after-school program, sharing these strategies could be useful to other program leaders in the field. You may learn practical ways to recruit and retain program participants that could inform others, such as: were incentives needed and of so what and how much, or were there people in the community who were helpful with recruitment? Recruitment and retention are issues that affect programs that may serve hundreds or even thousands of participants. Sharing what worked in your program through publishing is one way to disseminate your knowledge and strengthen other adolescent programs. Publishing the lessons you learn, assists others with developing and implementing successful programs for adolescents.

**Conclusion**

This article provides practical information and guidance for individuals who work with adolescents to encourage publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Providing the most up-to-date information for programs helps to improve the quality and sustainability of interventions. Our intent is to increase the understanding of the steps in publishing and help those who have useful knowledge to share their information beyond their own programs so that others can learn quicker; and more adolescents can experience a program that not only “speaks to them,” but also one they learn from. In turn, they hopefully can thrive and become healthy, productive adults.

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# Disclosure

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