

### Review the Figures and Tables

Closely review the figures and tables. Tables and figures should:

- Add to the understanding of the text.
- Complement the text and enrich the value of the manuscript, not duplicate information.
- Use numbers which agree with those cited in the text.
- Have a title which adequately describes the content.
- Be understood by the reader at first reading without hunting for more information from the text.

### Check the References

The most critical part of the review process is to check the accuracy of the content. Check to see that all references listed are accounted for in the manuscript. Also, it is important to spot check references. This can be done by randomly choosing a few references and checking them through a computer literature search program or by going to the library. Some reviewers check all references. If you are suspicious that some of the information came from another source, follow up to find out. Now is the time to find out if authors plagiarized someone's work and did not reference them.

Also, check to see that the references have been typed appropriately and follow the journal guidelines for referencing. Do not copy edit all the references, instead suggest the reader use the publication's reference style.

### Reread the Manuscript and Write Your Review

The final step is to reread the manuscript and write your review summary. I find it is much better to write the final review at least two days later. By providing some time between reading the manuscript and writing the review summary, you can solidify your comments and make sure that "extraneous variables" did not influence your review. You can also "tone down" reactions which are not appropriate such as anger (that they did not follow journal style and guidelines) or even jealousy (that the author wrote the topic before you).

Write your review on the forms provided by the journal. Each journal uses a different format and this format should be strictly followed. Some journals have two separate forms—one for the editor and one for the author, while others have sections for each on the same form. In either case, address most of your suggestions to the author. Some editors incorporate these suggestions in a cover letter to the author and others send your suggestions on directly. In either case, assume your suggestions will go to the author. If you need some confidential correspondence to the editor, place it in the editor comment section or write the editor a separate letter.

Whatever type of format is used, remember that as a reviewer you should be honest, thorough, and professional in your review. Remember to return both the manuscript and the review forms to the editor or editorial board

member. The manuscript is confidential information which belongs to the publisher when the author transfers copyrights to them and it cannot be discussed with others or referenced until published. Some journals provide a pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelope for your convenience while others do not.

### Summary

I find reviewing a rewarding experience. As with many skills, your review summaries and comfort with the process improve with time. Developing a system like the one above will help you to complete a thorough review with efficient use of your time.

### Author Description

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*Editor's Note: Watch for an upcoming article in this section describing successful ways to get on to editorial boards, which you can use, if you are interested in reviewing nursing manuscripts.*

## MANUSCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

### Elements of an Effective Query Letter

*Ruth Davidhizar, RN, DNS, CS*

Writing a query letter is difficult because it synthesizes a prospective article idea within one or two short paragraphs and needs to show a clear writing style. Yet, writing a letter to query an editor on his or her interest in a topic is helpful to the nurse author for several reasons. While a manuscript can only be sent to one editor at a time, the letter of inquiry may be sent to several editors simultaneously, and is thus a more rapid way to determine interest in a topic. It can also help you get feedback from an editor on ways the topic should be developed to make it suitable for the audience and style of the journal (Johnson, 1982).

While most nursing journals will accept unsolicited manuscripts and do not require a letter of inquiry, if the topic is unacceptable to the journals for which the topic is appropriate, a letter of inquiry can help the author avoid a lot of unnecessary work (Huston, 1988). For example, of the last 20 query letters I have sent, 10 editors were interested and later accepted the papers, 5 identified interest in a

*(continued on page 7)*

## Figure 1: Query Letter Elements

### 10 Elements of the Query Letter

1. A "working" title for manuscript
2. Brief description of idea
3. Author's qualifications to write on the idea
4. Compelling statement of why idea is important
5. Request for writer's guidelines, if needed
6. Statement indicating familiarity to journal
7. Author's time frame for writing the manuscript
8. A clear well-written and well organized writing style
9. Author's phone number and address
10. Enclosure of a self addressed stamped envelope

Date  
Editor's Name  
Journal Name  
Address, Zip

Dear (Editor's Full Name):

I would like to inquire about your interest in a manuscript I am presently developing with the working title of "When the Nursing Student Encounters the Child with an Oppositional Defiant Disorder." Children with this disorder display anger and aggressiveness.

For the past two years I have been involved with clinical supervision of BSN nursing students studying psychiatric nursing in a children's psychiatric hospital. The nursing students and staff have had many questions about this relatively new disorder. Little is written in the nursing literature on this subject and I have had to pull together information from a variety of sources in order to teach this subject.

If you are interested in reviewing a manuscript on this topic, I would appreciate any specific direction to make this manuscript of interest to the readers of (Journal Name). I reviewed your article styles and believe it would fit in your "New Diagnosis" section. I will be able to send the manuscript for review within a month after hearing from you. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,  
*Ruth Davidhizar*  
Ruth Davidhizar, RN, DNS, CS  
Assistant Dean and Chairperson for Nursing  
(Address and Phone Number)

enc: Stamped, addressed return envelope

(continued from page 4)

specific slant of the topic I proposed, and 5 indicated that the topic was not of current interest (thus saving my time).

Make sure to check guidelines published in the journal because some journal editors strongly suggest them while others request the completed manuscript without an earlier letter. If your target journals accept query letters, make the letters short and to the point.

In order to be effective, the query letter needs to be specific and describe the topic, slant, and timeliness of the idea. It should also describe your expertise in the subject. Make sure to include your address and phone number in the letter; one editor found that about 1 of 20 query letters has no return address on the letter. See Figure 1 for a list of

the 10 elements included in most query letters demonstrated in an example letter.

A well-written query letter can save you time and direct you to the best journal for your idea. Including all 10 elements in the short letter can be quite a challenge, but the process helps you to refine your idea and prepare for writing the actual manuscript.—Ruth Davidhizar, RN, DNS, CS, is Assistant Dean and Chairperson for Nursing at Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN, (219) 259-8511, extension 368.

### References

Huston, C. A guide to publication for nurses. Nursing Connection, Spring, 1988, 1 (1), 85-91.

Johnson, S. Selecting a journal. Nursing and Health Care, May, 1982, 258-263.