

Further Thoughts on Writing for Publication

As Editor, I have received several inquiries from rehabilitation educators wondering how they can improve the likelihood that submitted articles will be published in *Rehabilitation Education*. I would like to provide general guidelines and specific information that hopefully helps prospective authors. These suggestions are not particularly innovative and, in fact, if one were to look at prior editorials in this journal (e.g., Kosciulek, 2004; Kosciulek & Wheaton, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) as well as other journals (e.g., Kline & Farrell, 2005), most of them have already been articulated. My intent for providing further thoughts on publishing in this journal is to contribute to this literature and to use this forum in letting readers know that I will be updating and providing additional information and resources on the journal's link to the National Council on Rehabilitation Education at: <http://www.rehabeducators.org/>. Within the next few weeks this information should be available on the journal website. Relevant to this topic is that I plan to include a checklist of questions that authors may want to review prior to submitting an article for publication consideration. For now, I want to describe several fundamental points that may help new scholars and perhaps be a reminder for more accomplished scholars.

An initial consideration when submitting a manuscript is to determine whether the manuscript is relevant for the journal. As described in the Guidelines for Authors of each issue, there are a variety of identified topics that may help in this decision but perhaps a useful question is to simply ask, "Why would rehabilitation educators be interested in this topic?" In my limited time as Editor, I have already received a few manuscripts that, quite frankly, are well-written and informative but address a topic that is tangential to rehabilitation education and, for this reason, they were referred to other journals that were more relevant. As an operational criterion, articles that contain content germane to rehabilitation education research and practice are of prime interest such as topics addressing curriculum development, professional issues (e.g., accreditation, certification, licensure, service delivery training), interventions to develop and improve professional competence, analysis of pedagogical and clinical supervision training, and employment outcomes of rehabilitation personnel, to identify a few.

Another suggestion that would increase publication success is to have a trusted colleague with an established scholarship record review the manuscript before submission. Although this suggestion seems obvious for single-authored

papers, I would also recommend it for multiple-authored manuscripts as well. Sometimes when writing a study, developing a conceptual paper or providing a review of the literature on a relevant topic, authors tend to miss points that are obvious to someone not connected with the paper. Rather than relying solely on the formal peer review process that occurs with each submission, it may be useful to conduct a preliminary peer review process. Recognizing that it can be initially difficult for academicians (particularly "seasoned" ones) to ask another colleague for constructive feedback, if practiced over time, it may result in a mutually productive relationship for each person. I know of several colleagues who always solicit feedback from others before submitting manuscripts. I believe it is no coincidence that they also tend to be frequent contributors to the major rehabilitation and counseling journals.

When submitting a manuscript, there are several preliminary conditions that must be in place, and when they are absent, immediately result in negative reviews. For example, authors should verify that all cited references are accurate, complete, and in agreement with what is provided in the manuscript narrative and what is listed in the reference section. When there are frequent citation discrepancies, it suggests that authors did not view this as an important task and perhaps may be cavalier with other details. Other examples of lack of attention occur when the manuscript contains incomplete sentences, missing sections (e.g., limitations of study, implications for practice), inaccurate information contained in graphs or tables, spelling and grammatical errors, and/or content not central to the paper's purpose. Manuscripts that express ideas clearly, provide a logical flow of one idea or point that leads to another, and describe information in a concise way are indicative of good writing and good reviews.

With respect to data-based papers, authors should address the following points when submitting manuscripts:

1. Does the review of the literature culminate in a clear statement of the problem? There should be a clear link to how the literature cited leads to the major research questions of interest and thereby documents the need for the study.

2. Are there specific research questions/hypotheses that are defined operationally? After presenting relevant literature, it should link directly to the research questions and how concepts introduced in the literature review

pertain to outcome variables associated with the research questions of interest.

3. Is the research methodology explained sufficiently to allow for replication? Major procedural elements should be described so that readers understand what happened and the rationale for following the identified procedures. If the study involves the use of surveys then an explanation of the sampling methods and survey items should be detailed. Where appropriate, internal consistency or other reliability estimates of research scales for the sample selected should be described. If the methodology uses qualitative approaches then an accompanying rationale for using this approach with clear description of data collection procedures should be described.

4. Is there a clear explanation for choosing the selected research design and have the statistical assumptions associated with this design been met (e.g., collinearity, randomization)? Inherent in any research design are threats to internal and external validity. Readers should understand why the researcher employed a particular design and the advantages and limitations associated with the design chosen.

5. Beyond reporting statistical significance, it is often more informative to explain findings within confidence limit intervals and effect size estimates to better understand the utility of the data. Interested readers should find the article in this issue by Ferrin, Bishop, Tansey, Frain, Swett, and Lane particularly relevant. In cases where lack of statistical significance occurs, authors should ascertain whether there was sufficient statistical power.

6. Are conclusions and implications for research and practice consistent with data found in the study? Sometimes there is a tendency to overstate what the data indicate, particularly in cases where lack of statistical significance, weak effect sizes, and/or small confidence interval estimates occur. Generating other alternatives to explain findings (even statistically non-significant ones) can sometimes lead researchers to pursue other more meaningful research avenues.

Following these guidelines are indicative of good writing and should help prospective authors in making valuable contributions to the profession.

Passing of a Noted Scholar

Before closing, I want to acknowledge the passing of a very accomplished rehabilitation scholar, Dr. T. F. Riggart. Although I did not know Ted well, as a book chapter author for several of his co-edited textbooks, I always appreciated his humor and candor. I also want to publically acknowledge something that perhaps many rehabilitation educators did not know about Ted and something indicative of his commitment to our profession.

As one becomes a published scholar, it is usually the case that invitations to write book chapters follow. Usually, there is no remuneration given to book chapter authors and any book royalties are forwarded to the editor. Ted and former colleague who edited several rehabilitation counseling textbooks, Dr. Dennis Maki, decided years ago that royalties from their edited books would be returned to professional associations such as the National Council on Rehabilitation Education. As the additional tribute offered by Stacie Robertson and Carl Flowers, two of Ted's colleagues at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale indicates, Dr. Riggart was a generous man in other ways as well. He will be missed.

References

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