

Writing for CBPR Publication in Public Health/Other Journals

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Why write?

- ◆ Importance of the message
- ◆ Part of the job
 - Public health professional
 - The academic
 - ◆ Promotion, tenure:
 - ◆ “Professing” – telling an important story, teaching
 - ◆ Doing something enjoyable
 - Work of the “assistant”
- ◆ Social responsibility, social justice

The Story Line

- ◆ What is the story you're trying to tell?
Your passion/creativity
- ◆ Why is the story important?
 - Changing "the literature"
 - Change "the world"
- ◆ Thematic outline
 - Story should emerge from topic sentences of all paragraphs in article
 - Write the thematic outline before beginning data collection & change later

Audience/Write for the Reader

- ◆ Who should read this story?
 - Policymakers
 - ◆ Imperfect relationship between knowledge and power
 - ◆ Don't respond to journals only – executive summaries, policy briefs, media importance
 - Academics, public health professionals, students
 - ◆ Main audience for journals
 - General (“informed,” “concerned”) public
 - ◆ Other press and media work more important
 - Community: community briefs, newsletters

Story of CBPR Process

- ◆ Write about early stages/processes:
 - Formation/development of Partnership
 - Different Perspectives of Partnership
 - Write about research stages:
 - ◆ Questions/instrument/data collection processes
- ◆ Write about facilitators/barriers
- ◆ Create Shared Analysis and Reporting
 - Not “ventriloquism,” but multiple spaces so the lived experience of our partners can be heard and validated (Spivak 1990)

CBPR Process: Write with Advisory Group

- ◆ What are your shared principles about data ownership/dissemination?
- ◆ How to develop shared principles:
 - Look for examples (CCPH/informal networks)
 - Brainstorm yourself:
 - ◆ Lead authorship/PI role
 - ◆ Co-authorship of community members
 - ◆ Publications committee
 - ◆ Process of approval (long and fast-track)

Community Products as Scholarship

- ◆ Academic vs. Community Needs
 - Publication lag-time vs. action needs
 - Scientific analysis vs. summaries/briefs
- ◆ Community products for tenure and promotion:
 - Assure “quality”/peer review
 - Create other criteria: impact on community, impact on policy
 - Letters from key stakeholders

The Writing Process

- ◆ Play/passion versus drudgery
- ◆ Free form writing
 - Avoid self-censorship and self-criticism
- ◆ Self-editing
 - After free form
 - Reading aloud
- ◆ Editing by colleagues inside and outside your field
- ◆ “Objective” style doesn’t require bad writing/*Elements of Style*

Style

- ◆ “Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ◆ “Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- ◆ “If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- ◆ “Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- ◆ “Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- ◆ Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.”

- George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language” (1946)

Style (cont.)

- ◆ For specific style, study the journal to which you decide to submit.
- ◆ For medical and public health journals, usually most recent version of *Uniform Requirements*
 - Slight variations for specific journals may prove important to editors, at least subliminally, so customize to journal (a small investment)

Choosing the journal

- ◆ “High impact” journals
 - Circulation
 - Citation index
 - If you believe the message warrants a large readership, go ahead and try.
 - ◆ Turnaround usually faster than lower impact journals
 - ◆ Editorial standards often no stricter
 - Examples: Lancet, NEJM, JAMA, AJPH – each 100,000’s per issue, worldwide.

Choosing the journal (cont.)

- ◆ “Medium impact” journals
 - Circulation: 5-10,000's
 - Citation index mid-range
 - E.g., in public health: Medical Care, Public Health Reports, Annual Review of Public Health, American Journal of Epidemiology
- ◆ Low impact journals
 - Circulation: less than 5,000
 - E.g. Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved

CBPR-oriented Journals

- ◆ Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education and Action (Johns Hopkins)
- ◆ Action Research (U.K.)
- ◆ Health Education Journals: Health Promotion Practice/Health Ed and Behavior
- ◆ Look for special issues: American Journal of Preventive Medicine

Initial submission

- ◆ Study Instructions for Authors, editorial board, recent issue, recent article(s)
 - Follow instructions closely – delays and irritation if you don't.
- ◆ Abstract is critical for initial review
- ◆ Cover letter should give editor information needed:
 - Specify section or column if appropriate.
 - Clarify how fits journal's mission may help.
 - Provide information requested about authors' participation, related submissions, etc.

Initial submission (cont.)

- ◆ Initial query letter, phone call, or e-mail message may help occasionally, but editors usually wish to see the full manuscript.
- ◆ Note different expectations for different categories of articles: empirical research, structured review articles, etc.
- ◆ Reminder messages are ok after usual or specified period of review (usually 2-3 months).

Peer review

- ◆ Luck plays an important role.
- ◆ Review rarely stays anonymous about authors, usually stays anonymous about reviewers.
- ◆ Peer review has shown many weaknesses, such as commercial interests, superficial review, competition between reviewers and authors, etc.
 - See research published in JAMA.
- ◆ In general, most writers believe that peer review leads to improved publications.

Initial response from editors

- ◆ Decision reflects rejection/ acceptance statistics.
 - High impact journals report acceptance rates of about 10%
- ◆ Rejection letters can prove helpful even for resubmission to the same journal.

Initial response from editors (cont.)

- ◆ Revise and resubmit letters should lead to careful revision with cover letter explaining responses to each suggestion by editor and reviewers (even if you disagree and do not change in response).
- ◆ Acceptance without revision proves very rare.
- ◆ A thick skin becomes an occupational requirement.

Revision process

- ◆ Should respond to each and every comment by editor and reviewers.
- ◆ Courteous tone and comprehensive response in the cover letter helps.
- ◆ Review by colleague(s) can help in revision as well as initial submission.
- ◆ Similar reminder applies after reasonable time period.

Acceptance

- ◆ For public health publications, you should work with a public information person to reach the media.
 - Most scientific publications require translation into popular language.
- ◆ Other outreach to policy makers may facilitate change resulting from a publication

Gratifications of publishing

- ◆ The process can be fun (at least partially).
- ◆ The results can achieve changes that go beyond narcissism.
- ◆ Can help in career advancement.
- ◆ Long term effects on people's thinking, policy, and society.