

Following the Rules

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Growing up means that you have to make the rules, not just follow those set by others, and, at times, having rules makes a lot of sense.

I am getting better at following the rules as I grow older, although I still bristle at many of them. I was a typical rebellious teenager; no one understood me, David Bowie was my idol, and, one day, my generation was going to change the world. Now I really want people to understand me: David Bowie remains one of my favorite singers and, yes, my generation has changed the world, and not necessarily for the better. Growing up means that you have to make the

rules, not just follow those set by others, and, at times, having rules makes a lot of sense.

The publishing world has many rules. Some of the rules are based on ethical principles: don't

copy someone else's words or work, don't lie about results, and don't assign authorship to someone who didn't actually write the manuscript. You'd think that those would be fairly simple rules to understand and abide by, and they mostly are. Other rules are couched in slightly softer tones. Like almost all other professional journals, we publish instructions for authors. These are instructions, not suggestions, and we have created them to guide potential authors. They are a recipe for the structure of the manuscript that we want to see: no ifs, ands, or buts.

In a useful article published in *Nurse Author and Editor*, a quarterly

open-access publication for and about nurse authors and editors, Saver (2016) highlighted a long list of tips and facts about writing for publication. In full disclosure, I responded to a request from her for editorial secrets, and my contribution (I am sure that other editors named this one, too) was the first one on the list: "Following the author guidelines helps increase your chance of getting published."

This many seem like a no-brainer, and most authors do exactly that. They go to the journal website, read or even print the instructions for authors, and follow them to the letter. The abstract is structured correctly, with all required headings completed. They keep within the word limit (or explain why they haven't and ask for leniency in their cover letter) and use American Psychological Association (APA) format. They submit tables and figures in the requested format and include all required components, including copyright permission forms. This tells me that they really want to be published in the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)* and that they have followed the rules.

But there are always some who don't do what is required. I can tell when someone has submitted a manuscript that obviously was rejected by another editor and turned around and sent it on to this journal. Often, no attempt is made to follow the instructions for a structured abstract or essential components of the abstract and text are missing. If you submit to a nursing journal, why would you not include information that relates

to nursing care or research? If APA format is not used, that is a clear sign to me that the other journal uses American Medical Association or some other style and that *ONF* is second or third choice. I can accept that authors will prioritize where they want their work published and start at the top and work their way down if they are rejected—I have done that myself—but do it right! Give the editor, and the journal, a manuscript that follows the guidelines so that we are not put off by inattention to detail that often appears to be disrespectful. And authors need to remember to alter the cover letter. If it contains the name of another editor or journal, the submission is not going to be well received. And I can smell a manuscript that

has been ghost written by a pharmaceutical or medical device company a mile off.

I always appreciate a letter of inquiry ahead of submission. Often times, students do this and I use this as a teaching opportunity just in case the student's professor has not provided clear guidance. If I am interested in their work, I remind the student that they need to follow the instructions for authors and I always appreciate a brief description of what they intend to submit. It often is a capstone project that does not fit the needs of this journal and I try to point them in another direction, often to our sister journal, the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*.

Since 2011, *ONF* has ranked as either number 1 or 2 among the

110 nursing journals by impact factor. (Currently, our impact factor is 2.788.) We accept just less than 50% of manuscripts submitted, reviewed, and revised. Time from submission to initial decision is just 32 days on average. This journal reaches more than 39,000 members and institutional subscribers six times a year. These are good statistics, and ones that attract the best researchers and authors in our field. Being published in *ONF* is a good thing, so follow the rules and success is likely to follow, for all of us.

Reference

- Saver, C. (2016). 40 things editors won't tell you (but you need to know). *Nurse Author and Editor*, 26, 6. Retrieved from <http://naepub.com/publishing/2016-26-1-6>