

Government of Madras Midwifery Examination

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In the recent Board Examination in Midwifery and Gynaecology held in the Gifford School-Government Hospital for Women and Children, Madras, 37 candidates sat for the examination out of which 34 passed and 3 failed.

EXCHANGE

How to Write Articles for the Nursing Journals

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From "American Journal of Nursing"

Every one who reads these lines knows some one thing that no one else knows, or has had some experience not exactly duplicated by anyone else. It may be a very small thing. The experience may not seem of any importance at all. On the other hand, it may be of the greatest importance and of the greatest interest to many other people. Or again this unique body of knowledge may be of no intrinsic value or interest to one section of the public and still be of the highest significance to others.

Every nurse is the possessor of such information. Her richest store of knowledge doubtless grows out of her professional activities—out of what she has seen and done while caring for the sick in the hospital and in the home. It is because she possesses this knowledge that the nurse should write—not plays, poems, and novels necessarily—but articles.

I just said, "The nurse should write." I said it advisedly. I have met and talked with, and tried to teach, so many would be writers who "want to write" instead of having something to say that I am always delighted when a professional man or woman presents himself to me as a student. The nurse, like members of the other professions, approaches the writing of informative prose in a far finer spirit than does the dilettante who wishes to be a writer because he wishes to appear among the literary élite, or because he wishes to register his personality. Consequently, I say that the nurse should write. She really has something to communicate to other nurses. It is to the advantage of the profession that the nurse write in order that her experience, knowledge, and wisdom be added to the general store.

Because I do believe that nurses have something valuable to communicate, I listened sympathetically to the editors of the *American Journal of Nursing* when they asked me to write this article. Like the editors I had learned from years of experience that professional men and women—nurses specifically—have a great deal to communicate, but have received no special training in the arts of communication. Their training has been of another sort. They have mastered the technics involved in caring for patients, but few have mastered the technics involved in the planning and writing of articles.

Any readers who have followed me thus far are consequently warned. They are embarked on a discussion of the whys and hows of article writing. I shall consequently assume that my readers know something—are masters of some body of fact—and are ready to embark on the venture of organizing this material for presentation to a reading public.

The nurse who writes articles, like any other technician or engineer, must first look over the ground, study her objectives, decide on her purpose before she considers ways and means of attaining this objective and establishing her purpose—which raises the question, "What is the objective of the writer of articles?" To which I answer dogmatically—Communication.

Now communication involves reaching other minds. It involves influencing other minds. Communication in prose involves managing words in sentences, sentences in paragraphs, and paragraphs in articles, in such a way that the reader perceives and understands and believes something very similar to what the writer has in his own mind when

he writes. The honest writer on scientific and professional subjects writes, not to expand his own ego, to express his soul, to escape from reality, but to communicate to his contemporaries his sense of the truth.

The first practical application of this principle to article writing is for the nurse who writes to decide whether she chooses to communicate her sense of the truth to the layman or to other members of her own profession. Does she wish to reach the mind of the reader of the local newspaper, of a popular five-cent weekly, of a high brow monthly, or of a nursing journal?

If she wishes to communicate to the layman, she must recognize that her problem is complicated by initial lack of interest on the part of her reader. If, however, the nurse writes for a journal circulating among readers who, like herself, are nurses, she can safely assume that these readers have some initial interest in what she has to say. When her reader is mentally or physically weary she may pick up a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* or some other popular magazine. In these magazines she expects some entertainment—more entertainment than information. But when she looks into her copy of the *American Journal of Nursing* she is in a different frame of mind. If she is mentally awake, she looks for articles which promise to be of some value to her. She doesn't mind a little brightness now and then, but she resents as intrusions exactly those stimulants to reading which she enjoys in the popular magazine. She wants no words wasted, but she wants full information. She wants the facts and she wants to be told what the facts mean. Then she is in a position to agree with the writer and add to her own competence by putting the writer's recommendations into practice, or if she is in possession of other facts which point toward a different conclusion, she is in a position to write an article of her own to call attention to these other facts.

Our writer has now made two important steps in the process of article writing. She has a body of facts to communicate and she has made up her mind what reading public she wishes to reach. Her third step is to make up her mind what she wants to say.

That last statement may sound odd. My readers who wish to be writers are likely to think that if they know some valuable facts and know to whom they wish to communicate these facts, then all they have to do is to go ahead and communicate them. Such a misapprehension is at the bottom of too many bad articles in all the professional journals. The writer of such articles has his facts—true and good as far as that goes—but the writer seems never to have asked himself, "What do these facts mean? What do they mean to me? What do I want them to mean to my readers?"

Frequently, however, the writer only *seems* not to have asked himself these questions. When I have read a writer's manuscript, time and again I have asked, "What have you really been trying to say in this article?" And time and again the writer has been able to tell me what he had in mind to say. But he had not said it. He had not really succeeded in communicating his sense of the truth to his reader. My report is usually an ancient formula. It runs like this: "Tell your reader at the beginning what you are going to tell him. Then in the body of the article, tell him your message. When you have finished telling him, tell him what you have told him."

But by no means all writers really know what their facts mean. Such writers somehow do not realize that facts *do* mean anything. I read, say, an article on nursing in Timbuctoo. I learn ever so many facts. The number of nursing schools, the attitude of the tribal medicine men toward professional nurses, the social position of the voodoo experts. But when I lay the article down, I say, "What of it? What has this to do with the American nurse today? What attitude is the reader to take toward these facts?" And in a medical journal I read, "Two Interesting Cases of Brain Abscess." Again I acquire a wealth of facts. I learn the symptoms manifested, the operations performed, and the situations of the unsuspected abscesses discovered post mortem. But I learn more than this. I perceive the writer's own sense of the truth. I learn what these facts mean. I am even able to formulate the meaning of the facts in some such way as this: "These two cases illustrate as a warning to the diagnosing physician that brain abscess may exist even in the absence of all the symptoms usually associated with its incidence."

If the writer hopes, and she should so hope, that her reader will carry away such an understanding of the facts in her article, she must see to it that the article does really

contain such a central idea. Before she even sets pencil to paper, the writer must mull over her facts until she has decided just what the facts mean to her. She should formulate the meaning of her facts in a declarative sentence. This formulation she can call her proposition or controlling purpose or theme or unifying idea. It should be all of these things.

With these three steps taken, the article is proceeding apace. The writer knows her facts, she knows the reading public to which she wants to communicate the facts, she knows in just what light the reading public is to be shown the facts. A fourth step must now be taken. The writer must plan her article.

Planning an article is not unlike planning a dietary. It involves three acts: First, the planner must make sure that she has included everything that goes into the article or dietary, and that she has excluded everything that should not go in. Second, the planner must group those items which go together. Third, she must decide on the order in which these groups must be taken. Like the planner of a dietary, the article planner must constantly bear in mind the needs of the recipient and she must decide what items go in the beginning of the article, the middle, and the end, just as the dietitian decides what the patient should eat until certain symptoms disappear, what he can eat next, and what he can eat during the next six months.

I assume that all my readers are aware that a dietary cannot safely be left to chance, that to give food to the patient "Just as it occurs to one" is unadvised. I make this plea because I have known all too many amateur and occasional writers who write things down in any old order, "just as it came to me," and imagine the results of an article.

Let me take up in the order of complexity, then, several typical problems of article planning. I notice that your editor would like to receive articles on such topics as "The Nursing of Five Patients with Pneumonia" and "How I Diverted Bored and Weary Patients." These topics would result in what are known as "How-to-do-it" articles. The author has done something, has had results from applying a process. The planning is simple. The writer will first see to it that the patients or cases have something in common. They will all probably throw light on the solution of a problem of nursing or of administration or show the relationship, as did one recent article, of mental and physical ills.

The writer will then first announce that such-and-such presents a problem common and important enough to be worth solving. Then she will declare that her cases throw some light on the solution of this problem and will tell the stories of her cases. Finally she will point out just what lesson is to be learned. I here sub-join a skeleton outline for problem and solution articles.

1. X presents a problem.
2. The problem is important.
3. Its solution presents difficulties.
4. The following solution has been offered.
5. But the suggested solution has the following drawbacks.
6. A better solution is Y.
7. The excellence of his solution is demonstrated by. . .

8. We should support this solution. It is obvious that our article on five patients with pneumonia might develop only sections 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7; or even 1, 6, and 7 of the outline. But every now and then a writer may deal with a complicated problem and solution situation which would require all eight steps of the suggested plan if it were to be discussed adequately.

A different sort of plan for an article grows out of a different sort of material and a different controlling purpose. Instead of answering the question, "How did you solve the problem?" the writer may be asked to answer the question, "What is it and what is it good for?" or "What is it and what is it composed of?" or "What is it and what are its causes, results, or cures?"

Answering the question "What is it?" always involves definition. Fortunately there is a technic, tried and tested for 2,500 years, for defining. This technic involves first placing the thing to be defined into an appropriate class or pigeonhole and then showing how it differs from other individuals in the same class or pigeonhole. For instance, I recently had to look up "encephalitis," because I did not know what it was

and the writer of an article did not tell me. I learned that encephalitis is an inflammation (class of disorder) of the brain (thus different from other inflammations). Other authors were more kind to me. One told me that coryza is an infection (class), mild in nature, and caused by eight or ten organisms usually in some combination (thus different from diphtheria, for instance, which is not mild and is caused by only one organism).

However important it is to define, a definition is not a whole article. The next step is frequently the division or analysis of the subject into manageable units. A writer on coryza must first decide on the principle of her division. Is she going to write on the causes of coryza, the sequelae, the methods of treatment? Let her give an article to each and deal with one aspect at a time and deal with it thoroughly.

The writer of one recent article on Case Study wisely chose to limit her discussion to "The values of case study methods as used in schools of nursing." Other articles could effectively deal with other aspects of the whole subject, such as its history, its value in public health organizations, and its methods.

In this article the values of case study were analyzed as follows:

1. It helps the student nurse to consider her patient as an individual.
2. The student learns to use the findings of others.
3. She must learn to plan her study.
4. Nursing measures are understood in relation to definite conditions.
5. The student learns that she has a teaching function.
6. She begins to have a preventive and public health point of view.
7. She is led to see that each case presents a problem which she may help to solve.
8. It gives her an opportunity for self-criticism.

To test such an analysis for logical soundness requires a consideration of three questions:

1. Is the division based on a single principle? (In the foregoing analysis this means, "Are all these rightly to be considered as values?")
2. Is the division complete? (That is, "Are there no other values which might be considered?")
3. Do the divisions overlap? ("Is there any element in that section of the division numbered 3, for instance, which is also included under 2?" In a logical division there should be no overlapping.)

In the article I have just been analyzing, the writer began by showing that the subject of case study was timely, she proceeded to show that it had a history, she next defined it, and continued by developing, paragraph by paragraph, the analysis of the values case study seemed to have in schools of nursing. This is sound procedure in the explanation of many subjects.

But when, asks the writer, do we begin writing? Your discussion has been going on and on, and I have written nothing on my own article! When do I begin?

I answer that the writer has not been ready to begin to write until she has thought, that the preliminary thinking that goes into article writing is really just as important as the writing itself, if not more so.

And now let me tell a story. Once a mother got worn out because her little girl chattered all the time. She said impatiently, "You talk too much. You should think before you speak." "But mamma," replied the child, "how do I know what I think till I've said it?"

There is much truth in this little story. Many people are unable to systematize their thoughts until these thoughts are actually expressed. For such people a good procedure, though a time-consuming one, is to sit down and write out all that occurs having a bearing on the subject. After the writer has a pile of manuscript without beginning or end, she can scissor it, paste it, torture it into an order, a sequence, until she finally has a finished product which is as logically sound and as smoothly progressive as if she had planned it all out before putting pencil to paper. Such a writer may protest that she just cannot use an outline. This protest is not, however, strictly accurate. The writer does her planning and makes her outlines after she has made a first draft, instead of before. The results may be quite the same, although the method of work may seem messy to the writer who, like the architect, plans first, and builds afterward.

The writer, then, if she has not yet written, is ready to write. What temptations should she resist? Two occur to me. The first temptation manfully to be resisted is the temptation to write Literature. Somehow or other many charming people, who speak intelligently, easily, clearly, envelop themselves in a sort of spiritual academic cap and gown when they sit down to put their words on paper. They feel that the occasion is one of great solemnity and that the proper thing is the assumption of the style of Pater, Macaulay, or Addison. This is a mistake. The occasion is serious, but not solemn. Let the writer value sincerity above pretentiousness. Let her writing rather resemble her own speech—at its best.

The other temptation to be resisted is the opposite of the first. It is the temptation to be slovenly. It is akin to the temptation that besets some learned members of the professions who seem to say, "Because I know so very much and because I am so very important, it is really beneath me to attend meticulously to such matters as neatly combed hair and clean linen." When such people write, alas, they transfer case records from their files to their manuscript without editing. The crabbed style of filed data—omitted a's, an's, the's and even more necessary parts of speech—are inexcusable blemishes on the printed page. Let such people also endeavor to make their writing resemble their own speech—at its best.

If the writer, when she comes to look over her finished product, feels uncertain about the agreement of some of her subjects and predicates, or of her pronouns and their antecedents, she may find it worth while to review her grammar. If she is not quite certain as to the spelling of a word, let her thumb her desk dictionary, her bulky and inseparable writing companion. If she wishes to decide matters of usage in punctuation, capitalization, use of hyphens, and like conventions, let her keep on her desk a *Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press. If the writer wishes to go more intensively into this whole matter of writing articles for publication, excellent books are available.

As I reread what I have written, I begin to fear that I have made the whole process of article writing seem unduly difficult. I hope I have not. Even though the writing of an article, like other acts of creation, has its painful aspects, it also has its rewards. I hope my readers can enjoy these justly earned rewards. By all means *write that article*.

Obstacles

Sometimes we wonder why obstacles come,
They seem to put everything clear out of plumb,
And we usually vote them a bore;
But they give one a tussel,
They harden your muscle,
And that's what an obstacle's for
Just once in a while your train may be late
And it always just happens upon the wrong date
These obstacles rouse your red gore;
But, they force you to hustle,
They limber your muscle,
And that's what an obstacle's for.
These obstacles stick very close to each other,
When one comes along you will soon see his brother;
If there's one there are probably four;
They sure make you hustle,
They swell out your muscle,
So you see what an obstacle's for.

H. ROBT. BRADEN.

—(From 'the Canadian Nurse'.)