Turning assignments into articles

It is that time of year again when newly qualified midwives are starting their first posts and eager new student midwives are beginning their courses. These new beginnings have been on many people's minds, including our own Karen Barker, who in her Birthwrite column this month (page 614) discusses the skills and confidence newly qualified midwives need to succeed and thrive in their new roles. It also got me thinking. At the *British Journal of Midwifery* we encourage and receive a lot of submissions from students and first-time authors looking to turn theses and assignments into an article. These theses are frequently well over our word limit of 3000–4000 words and authors often ask me the best way to turn it into something more publishable that will appeal to our readers. So I thought I would take this opportunity to provide some helpful pointers to all you budding authors who are thinking of submitting to us.

Firstly, you should consider your audience. The *British Journal of Midwifery* aims to provide the most relevant and up-to-date original research, evidence-based papers and clinical reviews, to establish best practice in midwifery. Our goal is to challenge readers to reflect on and evaluate their own practice. We (myself, the editorial board, and our peer reviewers) look for articles that will interest our readers and that may contain a new way thinking or challenge current practice, while being well researched and evidence-based. It is not always about an innovative practice, you may want to cover a well-known area but in greater detail or in a different way.

All good articles start with an idea, and that idea should be carried throughout the article to keep the reader focused; therefore, it is important to be clear on your message before you start. Why does your question need to be answered—what are you adding to current knowledge? It is always a good idea to write a plan for the article. You may want to look back on your original plan for your thesis and refer to it throughout the process. It can also make it easier to chop out less relevant parts of the article. You will need to be ruthless when adapting your assignment for publication. So it is important to be clear on what the reader will want to know. Your article should make sense to someone without reading everything on the reference list. Avoiding jargon and using straightforward language may help cut your assignment down—long words do not make an article sound more impressive. Although many of our readers are lecturers, they will not be marking your article and may not be interested in the full methodology of your paper, you only need to provide a brief outline, not the full history and reasoning behind research methods, for example.

Furthermore, there may have been new developments or guidelines since you first carried out your research, therefore it is important to have another look through the literature before you submit your article.

It is imperative that you re-read your article before you submit it and check it against the journal's guidelines, the journal may have a different referencing style to what you are used to. Double check that all the references in the text appear in the list and that your grammar and punctuation is as good as you can make it. An accepted article will be proofread before it is published, but you can save us a lot of time if you also do this.

Most importantly, do not submit to more than one journal at the same time. There is nothing more frustrating for an editor than to discover that an article they have been working on has been submitted and accepted somewhere else and that there is now a space in the journal where your article was going to go that needs to be filled. Following peer review, most articles will be asked to be revised in some way, do not take this as a negative criticism of your work, see it as adding another expert's opinion to your article. Finally, if your article is not accepted, don't be discouraged, keep on trying. Your article might be more suitable for another journal.

So for all those looking to write for us; student, newly qualified or not-so-newly qualified midwives, have a go and get stuck in. We look forward to receiving your articles. Good luck. **BJM**