Research articles

These guidelines are designed to help you submit suitable research articles to the evidence & practice section of the RCNi journals.

What follows is an overview of how to write research articles for publication in any RCNi journal and should be used in conjunction with the general article guidelines for the evidence & practice section. For Evidence Based Practice, however, see specific guidelines.

Research articles need to be written to a specific format. It is advisable to access example papers from your chosen journal before starting. We would also advice that you gain support from an experienced author of research papers if you are new to this type of writing.

The article should be no more than 4,000 words in length excluding references. Please be aware that articles exceeding this word limit may be sent back to the author to make cuts before being sent for external peer review. The date the research was conducted should be stated. Research that is more than five years old should not be submitted.

Abstract
The abstract should be about 150 words long and summarise the research aim, methods, results or findings, and conclusion.

Abstract for Nurse Researcher
If you are writing for Nurse Researcher, use the following headings in your abstract: Background, Aim, Discussion, Conclusion, Implications for practice, Keywords.

Background
The background should include information to set the context for the chosen subject and could also provide a rationale for the study.

Literature review
The literature review should provide a critical analysis of published work, especially research, in your chosen area of study. Any gaps in the literature should be identified. The review should also include the most recent and relevant publications on your chosen topic as well as any seminal work in this area. The importance and relevance of your work and the need for such a study should be outlined.

Please note that a small number of research studies may have no literature review due to their methodology.

Aim
The aim of the research or the research question should be stated after the literature review.

Method
The research methods should be reported in this section of the article. Was a quantitative or qualitative approach to research design selected? What tool was used to collect the data and how were the results of findings analysed? Has the data collection tool been used in previous studies to increase reliability; if not, did you conduct a pilot study to test the tool? How was the sample selected, taking into account bias and representativeness?

The sample size, rationale for this and characteristics of the participants that might influence the results should also be discussed. The method of data analysis should be outlined and rationalised.

Ethical approval must be obtained for all research and this, along with the consent gained in the study, should be discussed in this section of the article.

Results or findings
In quantitative research, the results should be discussed in detail and the text should be supported with tables and graphs to simplify and give meaning to the data. Both numbers and percentages should be provided in the text and any tables. If the research is qualitative, this section should be headed ‘findings’ and contain verbatim extracts from the focus groups or interviews to support the text. The verbatim quotes should be coded, for example, Participant A or Participant 1, and so on. Interpretation of the comments is encouraged and any unexpected or unusual findings should also be acknowledged.

Limitations
The authors should comment on any limitations of the study at the start of the discussion section. This should include discussion of any problems encountered while conducting the study, problems with generalisability and how the research could have been improved.

Discussion
The results or findings should be discussed in relation to the aim of the study, other research findings, and what is already known in the field (literature review). The significance of the research and the implications for practice should also be detailed.

Conclusion
The main points in the article and overall findings of the research should be mentioned and summarised in this section of the article. The conclusion should provide a clear answer to the research aim, and is likely to reflect the statement of the aim at the beginning of the article.

Recommendations
It is important to reflect on any recommendations that you wish to make. What do you feel should happen now on the basis of the findings or results?
Implications for practice

A box highlighting up to six implications of the research for practice should be presented in bullet points at the end of the article.

Acknowledgements

If you wish to acknowledge a person(s) or organisation(s), please contact the relevant person(s) or organisation(s) and ensure that they are happy to be named in your article and confirm this in writing.

Conflict of interest

Authors should declare any conflict of interest, financial or otherwise. If this applies to you, please provide a statement acknowledging this at the end of the article.

References

All written material should be referenced using current literature and primary sources. Please adhere to the Harvard style for writing references (see below) and ensure that all the information required is included.

It is the author's responsibility to ensure that references are accurate. Overuse of online internet references is not advisable because these may be unreliable; links can break easily and information may be withdrawn at any time.

References in the text

Please ensure you use the Harvard (name and year) system for references in the text. For example, 'It has been suggested that nurses should examine their relationship with patients (Brown 2015)'. For three or more authors, print the first author's name followed by 'et al', for example 'White et al (2016) argued.' Note that White et al is acceptable for White, Red and Blue but not for White and Red, which should be written as 'White and Red (2016)'. When several references are cited simultaneously, the order should be chronological, from earliest to most recent. If there are two or more references to the same author, the order should also be chronological, for example ‘(NICE 2016, 2017)’.

References in the reference list

Each journal reference should include (in this order):

1. The author's surname and initial(s); write the surname and initial(s) of all authors for references with three authors or fewer. For four or more authors, write the first three and add 'et al'.
2. The year of publication in brackets.
3. The title of the article in full.
4. The name of the journal in full.
5. The volume, issue number and first and last page numbers, separated by a hyphen.
6. Use alphabetical order for references. If there are two or more references to the same author, use chronological order.

Each book reference should include (in this order):

1. The author's surname and initial(s). Please indicate if the people cited are editors.
2. The year of publication in brackets.
3. The title of the book in full.
4. The edition (if not the first).
5. The publisher.
6. The city of publication (and the state if in the US, province or territory in Canada, and territory in Australia).
7. If you are citing a chapter in a book, supply the author's name, chapter title and page numbers.
8. Use alphabetical order for references. If there are two or more references to the same author, use chronological order.

Examples


Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unreferenced use of others’ published work or unpublished ideas or opinions that are represented as your own work: for example, copying or paraphrasing text, a sentence, paragraph, table or figure from another’s work and not referencing it. Plagiarism also applies to work that you have published previously.

The article must be your own work and should be written in your own words. All mention of others’ work must be attributed to the originating author(s) and referred in full. Any direct quotations must be included in single quotation marks. If substantial sections of text or illustrative material are used in the article, you must obtain written permission from the copyright holder before submitting the article for publication. All articles submitted to RCNi are checked for plagiarism using an automated software package.

Deadlines

Editorial deadlines are set to allow time for the articles to be peer reviewed and edited. Articles are subject to peer review. It is imperative that authors keep to the deadlines agreed with the commissioning editor so production schedules can be maintained and the high-quality of the articles ensured. You will be sent PDF proofs for checking in advance of printing. If for any reason you are unable to meet the agreed deadline, please inform the commissioning editor as soon as possible.

Complaints

RCNi is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which will investigate complaints that members have not followed the COPE code of conduct for journal editors. www.publicationethics.org.uk