

# Publish Your Writing: Sharing Your Ideas With the Early Childhood Community

by Donna Rafanello

*"I have a lot that I want to say."*

*"I have made a commitment to get published, but the reality is I will have to make time for it."*

*"I have considered writing for publication but am too scared. I have never been very confident in my writing abilities. I would like to have someone to work one-on-one with me to help improve my writing."*

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As the comments of these directors and teachers illustrate, many people want to write, but are overwhelmed by

the process and lack confidence in their writing abilities. The truth is that we all have a wealth of experiences to share about our work with young children and families. And writing for publication takes a unique set of (teachable) skills.

Whether you are just beginning your career in early childhood education or

have been in the field for 20 years, you have valuable insights and ideas to share with others involved in similar work. Exchange's Mentor Writing Project was created with you in mind. As a reader of *Exchange* for many years and an early childhood professional, I was struck by the need for new voices in the magazine, representing diverse experiences across program types, geography, curriculum, age groups, and so many other variables. So I worked with *Exchange* editor Bonnie Neugebauer to design an outreach and support service for people who want to share their experience with *Exchange* readers.

Building on the work of writing coach Diana Hacker (1999), I like to think of the writing process as being composed of three steps: planning, writing, and revision. Composing an article using these three steps ensures that you achieve your stated purpose, communicate your ideas in the clearest way possible, and present a professional product.

## Step 1: Planning

As any early childhood director knows, successful projects begin with good planning; writing is no different. Therefore, the first step in any writing project is

to assess the task in front of you. Use *The Planning Checklist* (adapted from Hacker, 1999) to help you prepare.

- What is your subject?
- What sources of information are available to you?
- What is your purpose in writing this article?
- Who is your audience?
- What constraints are there (e.g., length, format, deadlines)?

The topics you consider should be those in which you have some experience and insights to share. Familiarize yourself with publications you are interested in writing for by reviewing back issues (for content and style). Once you have generated some ideas for articles and explored these — at least in a preliminary way — it's time to settle on a tentative focus for your article.

## The planning checklist

### SUBJECT:

- Has a subject been given to you or are you free to choose your own?

- Why is your subject worth writing about?
- How broadly or narrowly you cover the subject will depend, in large part, on manuscript guidelines for the publication.
- How detailed should your coverage be?

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- Where will your information come from: Personal experience? Direct observation? Interviews? Reading? The Internet?
- What sort of documentation of sources is required? What style does the publication use (for example, American Psychological Association, APA)?

#### PURPOSE:

- Why are you writing: To inform readers? To persuade them? To entertain them? To call them into action? Some combination of these?

#### AUDIENCE:

- Who are your readers?
- How well informed are your readers? What do you want them to learn?
- How interested and attentive are they likely to be? Will they resist any of your ideas?
- What is your relationship to your readers: Expert to novice? Peer to peer?
- How sophisticated are your readers? What writing style is most suitable?

#### LENGTH AND FORMAT:

- Are you working with any length specifications?
- Must your article follow a particular format? If so, do you have guidelines or examples?

#### REVIEWERS AND DEADLINES:

- Who will be reviewing your drafts-in-progress?
- What are your deadlines? How much time will you need to allow for each stage?

### Step 2: Writing

Here's where — armed with a solid plan of attack — you begin writing. Word by word, paragraph by paragraph, section by section, your article comes to life.

#### Begin by writing an introduction:

- This is a short paragraph of 50 to 150 words that states your position.
- Use a hook to engage your reader in the first few sentences: A startling statistic, a vivid example, a quotation or bit of dialogue, a question, an analogy, or an anecdote.
- Conclude with a statement of your article's main point (thesis).
- If you find it difficult to introduce an article that you have not yet written, as many writers do, draft the body of the article first and save the introduction for later.

#### Draft the body of your article:

- Keep in mind what your article promises readers.
- Use your plan to map out each paragraph.
- Support each argument with specific evidence.
- Use facts and statistics, examples and anecdotes, to support your ideas.
- Cite expert opinion. (Who else has written on this subject? What have they said?)

#### Draft a conclusion:

- Summarize your main point, briefly.
- Avoid introducing new ideas.
- Maybe pose a question for future study, offer advice, or propose action.

- Consider including a detail, example, or image from the introduction to bring readers full circle; a quotation or bit of dialogue; an anecdote; or a humorous comment.
- End crisply, preferably on a positive note.

### Step 3: Revision

This is the step that all writers dread and that novices are likely to ignore entirely. But as accomplished writers can attest, good revision can make all the difference in communicating your ideas effectively to an audience. What I present here is a list of five types of revision that can strengthen your writing: Global revision, paragraphing, transitions, sentence revision, and proofreading (adapted from Hacker, 1999).

#### Begin with Global Revision:

- Try to distance yourself from a draft by putting it aside for a while.
- Return to your draft in the role of your audience.
- Ask friends and colleagues to give you feedback on your writing.
- Make big changes to improve the flow and sequence of ideas.
- Print out a hard copy to read it as a whole, rather than screen by screen.

#### Use Paragraphs Purposefully:

- to mark off the introduction and the conclusion
- to signal a shift to a new idea
- to indicate an important shift in time or place
- to emphasize a point (placing it at the beginning or end)
- to highlight a contrast
- to break up text that looks too dense

#### Use Transitions to Connect Ideas:

- *To show addition:* and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition,

- moreover, next, too, first, second
- *To give examples:* for example, for instance, to illustrate, in fact, specifically
  - *To compare:* also, in the same manner, similarly, likewise
  - *To contrast:* but, however, on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless, still, even though, on the contrary, yet, although
  - *To summarize or conclude:* in other words, in short, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up, that is, therefore
  - *To show time:* after, as, before, next, during, later, finally, meanwhile, then, when, while, immediately
  - *To indicate logical relationship:* if, so, therefore, consequently, thus, as a result, for this reason, since

**Revise and edit sentences for clarity and to catch grammatical errors.**

**Proofread the final manuscript:**

- Proofreading is a slow and methodical search for misspellings, typographical mistakes, and omitted words or word endings. Such errors can be difficult to spot in your own work because you may read what you intended to write, not what is actually on the page.
- Try proofreading out loud.
- Try proofreading your sentences in reverse order.

### The revision checklist

#### PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE:

- Does your article accomplish its purpose — to inform readers, to persuade them, to entertain them, to call them into action (or some combination of these)?
- Is your article appropriate for your audience? Does it take into consideration your audience's knowledge of the subject, level of interest in the

subject, and possible attitudes toward the subject? Is the reading level appropriate?

#### FOCUS:

- Do the introduction and conclusion clearly focus on the main point?
- Are there any ideas that do not support the main idea?

#### ORGANIZATION AND PARAGRAPHING:

- Do you give enough organizational cues (such as topic sentences or headings)?
- Are ideas ordered effectively?
- Do you use bulleted sections to help readers pull useful information easily?
- Does the paragraphing make sense?
- Are any paragraphs too long or too short for easy reading?

#### CONTENT:

- Does everything you say support your main idea/argument?
- Which ideas need to be developed further?
- Do your main ideas receive enough attention?
- Are there parts that might be deleted?

#### SUMMARY

- Do the words of the directors and teachers whose quotes opened this article resonate with you?

- Do you feel you have a lot to say to other early childhood professionals about subjects that are of interest to a wide audience?

- Have you made a commitment to getting published, but don't know how to start?

- Have you considered writing for publication, but lack confidence in your writing abilities?

The three steps to composing an article presented here — and the offer of help from Exchange's Mentor Writing Project — are sure to help you on your way to making your dream of publishing your writing a reality. The next step is up to you.

### References

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### Resources

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Does your career To-Do List include writing articles for publication?

Are you ready to share your expertise with other early childhood educators?

Have you published your writing and now are looking for new opportunities?

Then Exchange's Mentor Writing Project is for you!

- Receive individualized instruction from a writing coach.
- Develop your skills as a writer.
- Receive guidance and support through the article submission process.

For more information, contact Project Coordinator, Donna Rafanello, at [writingmentor@childcareexchange.com](mailto:writingmentor@childcareexchange.com). There is no charge for participating in the Project and authors receive payment upon publication.

***We look forward to hearing from you!***