Writing a continuing professional development article for publication


Abstract
Writing for journal publication is a worthwhile but challenging activity that requires clear motives, purpose, planning and execution. Continuing professional development (CPD) articles are designed to be informative and educative, with the aim of enhancing the reader's understanding of a particular subject. This article provides an overview of how to approach and plan the writing of a CPD article to enhance the success of its acceptance for publication in a professional journal.

Author
Bob Price
Director, postgraduate qualifications in advancing healthcare practice, Faculty of Health and Social Care, The Open University, Milton Keynes.
Correspondence to: altanprice@talktalk.net

Keywords
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Review
All articles are subject to external double-blind peer review and checked for plagiarism using automated software.

Aims and intended learning outcomes
The aim of this article is to assist novice authors to plan, construct and write a continuing professional development (CPD) article for publication in a professional journal. After reading this article and completing the time out activities you should be able to:

- Discuss the main features of a CPD article and why each is educationally important.
- Identify one or more subjects from your practice that could become the focus of a CPD article.
- Identify what is involved in planning and preparing a CPD article for publication.
- Describe how aims and intended learning outcomes are established and achieved.
- Formulate activities that support learning within a CPD article.

Introduction
Journals differ in the types of articles they publish and it is essential that the author adheres to the guidelines provided by the particular journal. For example, Nursing Standard provides relevant guidance about writing for publication, which is available at: http://rcnpublishing.com/r/author-guidelines. It is important to note that articles may undergo peer review, whereby two or more experts in a particular field will read the article against review criteria set by the journal, providing constructive comments. It is the responsibility of the author to address any recommendations made by the reviewers and while some recommendations may be rejected by the author it is important that he or she can justify his or her decision (Price 2014a).
Articles will also be checked for plagiarism, possibly using plagiarism detection software, to ensure that sources of information have been acknowledged correctly. Ensuring that information is supported with appropriate references, and that something extra is added by you the author, reduces the risk that others’ work is plagiarised (Price 2014a, 2014b).

CPD articles

CPD articles are likely to be an important means of nurses demonstrating that they have met their CPD commitment to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Under draft changes to the revised Code, nurses will be expected to complete 40 hours of CPD every three years, up from 35 hours, with 20 of those hours involving participatory learning (NMC 2014). Equally important is that nurses will need to demonstrate and record how they have reflected on their learning, linking this to their practice and the requirements of the Code. In addition, nurses will have to write at least five accounts demonstrating how they have reflected on patient feedback. Particular emphasis will be placed on demonstrating how the nurse individualises care, secures informed consent from patients, respects the dignity of individuals and promptly alerts those in authority to situations where the rights of individuals might be under threat (NMC 2014). Learning will be more interactive, and CPD articles offer support in this regard when the nurse submits an account of his or her learning, for example the Nursing Standard system of CPD practice profile submissions. Nurses completing a CPD article and submitting a reflective practice profile to the journal secure evidence that their reflective practice has been reviewed by others.

Individual nurses will need to demonstrate that they have practised for the requisite minimum number of hours as well as that they have met their CPD commitment. Nurses who do not meet the CPD requirement may see their registration lapse and have to complete a return to practice course of studies. Audit work is likely to be undertaken to ensure that claimed learning has in fact been completed and employers will be asked to make closer links between this requirement and annual appraisal. Few nurses, or employers, can afford significant study time away from work, so CPD articles will offer an important means to fulfil nurses’ professional development requirements. A CPD article generally provides an overview and educates the reader, providing up-to-date, appropriate, factual and evidence-based information. In the UK, The Code (NMC 2008) identifies four requirements associated with CPD that may be achieved, in part, by writing and publishing articles that assist nurses in practice. The four requirements include (NMC 2008):

- Standard 23, which states that the nurse ‘must facilitate students and others to develop their competence’. While much learning support is provided locally in practice, more may be shared by writing about your expertise or service improvements and disseminating this information through publication.
- Standard 25, which states that the nurse ‘must be willing to share skills and experience for the benefit of your colleagues’. Writing a CPD article might enable you to share your knowledge and experience with others to inform nursing practice.
- Standard 40, which states ‘You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life’. While a CPD article is written to benefit others’ learning, the research work needed to prepare this type of article will also enhance your insights.
- Standard 41, which states ‘You must take part in appropriate learning and practice activities that maintain and develop your competence and performance’. Attard (2012) explained the value of writing as a learning activity, which involves formulating arguments and explaining nursing issues. The structuring of written explanations of care will help you to clarify your understanding of practice.

Although writing for publication can be challenging, it is a valuable activity for many clinicians, especially those with specialist expertise to share or who have a practice improvement to report. Clinical nurse specialists or consultant nurses, who may be involved in pioneering new practice or conducting research, are well placed to write for publication (Holland and Watson 2012). When planning to write, it is essential to consider the journal and its readership, and to adhere to the specific author guidelines and style of the journal. The main purpose of a CPD article is to educate readers, and this involves structuring knowledge in such a way that it both informs readers and helps them to think differently about what they do (Driscoll and Driscoll 2002). Therefore, the article needs to be planned and structured carefully to ensure it achieves its purpose (Price 2010).
**Article-based learning**

While learning has been conceived in different ways by theorists, for the purpose of writing a CPD article, it can be described as a change in the nurse’s understanding relating to a particular subject and the subsequent changes in attitude, insight, feelings and practice that follow.

Learning not only helps to extend nurses’ understanding of a subject, it also prompts them to revisit what they thought they knew (Black and Farmer 2013). To learn successfully, nurses have to feel that the teaching is comprehensible, therefore some assumptions have to be made about what the reader already knows and the language, tone and style used needs to reflect this.

The article needs to be interesting to engage readers and alert them to new information, especially that derived from evidence-based practice (Schleter 2010). Learning activities – time out activities in CPD articles in Nursing Standard – in the article can be used to engage readers with the content and test their knowledge. Grealish and Smale (2011) emphasised the importance of this type of reasoning activity in nurse education, particularly since nurses have to use reasoning to solve problems on a daily basis.

CPD articles need to be structured in a way that recognises the considerable effort involved in learning and that nurses may have limited time available (Price 2010). For example, readers should be directed to resources that reinforce the main teaching points and can be accessed at a later date. The CPD article leads the reader through what may seem familiar knowledge to that which is less familiar and more taxing. The reader is assisted to explore beyond what might be described as his or her ‘comfort zone’. The optimal learning zone exists between comfort, with the risk of complacency, and panic, where the learner feels out of control. CPD articles should be structured and information presented in a way that enables readers to make this transition. Planning the article is essential and should involve identifying the main sections, proposed content and relevant references.

De Young (2008) and Rutherford-Hemming (2012) described how learners have a need to construct meaning from that which they encounter. CPD articles are designed to facilitate this process, to assist the reader understand what is important. Learning, in this instance, can be described as setting out a series of steps to help the reader achieve more knowledgeable practice. Each represents a different section of the article and its associated learning activities (Figure 1). Each step needs to be arranged in the right order and should be placed sufficiently close together to ensure that learning is unhindered. Each section of learning is designed to relate closely to that which has gone before and to minimise confusion (Gawronska 2012).

**Complete time out activity 1**

The length of a CPD article will vary depending on the journal – generally between 4,000 and 5,000 words in Nursing Standard – and generally it should be read in one sitting, and the associated learning activities should be completed within a couple of days. The article may amount to no more than four or five hours of reflective enquiry, involving reading the article and completing the learning activities. With this in mind, you should chose a subject that can be summarised reasonably quickly, but that remains open to some further enquiry, speculation and discussion.

Learning needs to proceed in manageable steps. In Figure 1, for example, the reader is led through a sequence of the patient’s psychological needs. The understanding of needs at the different stages of illness represent a framework for discussion of what the nurse can do to help and support the patient. Such a framework is useful because nurses often wonder what to do to support the patient at different stages during recovery and rehabilitation. There is a logical sequence to the explanations that are shared. This is not an article about myocardial infarction (MI) and its treatment, and the author anticipates that this has been well covered elsewhere. Psychological support is the focus of writing precisely because of the shortfalls in care identified in the introduction.

**Complete time out activity 2**

**Selecting a subject**

It is essential to select an appropriate subject to write about; one that you have the knowledge and expertise to cover appropriately, and one that relates to an area of practice that others are interested in and perhaps which has not been explored fully in the literature (Table 1). It is essential that you are able to cover the subject adequately in the word allowance. It is always a good idea to test out your potential subject with professional colleagues, those who know what you do and what practice has to offer in the particular area. It may also be worthwhile contacting a member of the journal’s editorial team to discuss your ideas or proposed article. Feedback from colleagues and the journal’s...
editorial team may help you to establish the focus, scope and purpose of the article.

**Planning the aims and intended learning outcomes**

CPD articles in *Nursing Standard* include a section entitled ‘Aims and intended learning outcomes’, of which the author is expected to provide four to six. They are designed to help the reader understand what the article aims to achieve. The intended learning outcomes describe what the reader will be able to demonstrate as a result of reading the article and completing the learning activities. The learning outcomes are ‘intended’ because as an author you cannot be sure that all readers will

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**FIGURE 1**

Series of steps showing how to structure a CPD article on the psychological effect of myocardial infarction (MI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims and intended learning outcomes:</td>
<td>The aim of this article is to assist the reader to explore the psychological effect of MI on the patient and work more confidently with patients to manage their anxiety and concerns. Example learning outcome: the reader will be able to describe how MI affects the patient’s sense of personal control and safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction:</td>
<td>Here the scene is set for learning, and it is important to focus on why it is important to explore the topic. The incidence of MI is reported and it is explained that many patients while treated successfully, have residual unaddressed psychological needs. The article will help inform the nurse and develop his or her confidence to address these issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The crisis event – initial psychological needs:</td>
<td>The reader is informed about patients’ psychological concerns at different stages of illness and the necessary nursing response. For example, fear of death is pertinent and the patient may be overwhelmed by being admitted to hospital and commencing treatment. Simple and clear explanations are required at this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the patient is stabilised:</td>
<td>The patient journey continues, but the individual’s needs are changing. For example, the patient starts to make sense of the MI event and to re-evaluate his or her body. The patient examines what he or she can do and what feels safe. The nurse responds by helping the patient to explore what has happened. The nurse helps place the event in context with regard to what caused the MI, but also highlights the efficacy of treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation:</td>
<td>The main psychological concerns as the patient starts to mobilise and rehabilitate are explained. Patients are often anxious about testing their physical ability, especially their tolerance of exercise. The nurse reassures the individual, showing how monitoring helps manage the exercise regimen and limits the risk of further MI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future psychological needs:</td>
<td>It is explained that as the patient nears the end of the rehabilitative phase, it is necessary for the individual to review his or her lifestyle. New ways of living and coping have to be identified, those that sustain independence and help support integrity. The nurse works with case illustrations of how others have adapted and alerts the patient to support agencies that can continue to provide individualised help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion:</td>
<td>It is acknowledged that it is beneficial to think of MI as a psychological journey as well as a physical one, involving treatment and care. This article has summarised that journey and suggested ways in which the nurse can support the patient during illness, recovery and rehabilitation. Further reading is identified to help the reader develop his or her understanding of the importance of psychological support for patients following MI.</td>
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</table>
achieve these. Generally, learning outcomes are written in behavioural terms, that is, they describe what the reader of the article can demonstrate to others (Avis et al 2010). Therefore, it is more appropriate to use words such as describe, list, define, and identify rather than know, understand or realise. It is better, for instance, to write, ‘describe the psychological needs of the patient following an MI’ than ‘understand the psychological needs of the patient following an MI’. In some articles, such as those relating to reflective practice or nurse ethics, more expressive terms may be appropriate, for example the reader will be able to ‘explore personal values relating to end of life.’ Learning here is more about insight, so words such as investigate could be used: ‘investigate the ways in which personal beliefs inform an understanding of patient needs during the last days of life.’

Complete time out activity 4

Learning outcomes should refer to what is possible as a result of studying the article and completing the learning activities. For example, in time out activity 4, the first learning outcome is optimistic as well as vague. It is unlikely that a single CPD article can equip the nurse to transform his or her practice in a given area completely and the meaning of the word arrange is also unclear. The second learning outcome does not use a behavioural term, such as discuss or describe. Colleagues might never be able to decide whether the nurse can explain such fears. The nurse needs to be able to demonstrate through behaviour what he or she can do. The third learning outcome is satisfactory because it is clear what the reader can do.

Complete time out activity 5

Structuring a CPD article

When you have established the purpose for writing the article, and identified an appropriate subject, the most appropriate readership and most appropriate journal for publication, you will need to develop a plan to ensure that the CPD article is well-structured and engages the reader. It is important to identify and order the main sections appropriately. If the sections are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Possible response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is this a clearly defined subject?</td>
<td>You need to be clear about your subject in the introduction and for this to be open to discussion within the limitations of the article, for example word limit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the subject important?</td>
<td>The subject needs to be important to readers as well as of interest to you. In Figure 1, the importance of the CPD article is established by referring to a reported shortfall in care - the unmet psychological needs of patients with MI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the target readership for this article?</td>
<td>It is necessary to imagine who will learn from your article and the nursing background of readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has this subject been published in a journal recently?</td>
<td>This is easily established by completing a short literature search on the chosen subject, using relevant key words. In Figure 1, the key words might be MI and psychological support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I the right person to write this article?</td>
<td>You will need to be familiar with the subject through your professional work, and to have considered what is problematic, misunderstood or not examined in the chosen area. If you are involved in a practice innovation in the subject area then you may have an extra claim to expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What don’t colleagues usually understand about this subject?</td>
<td>Writing a CPD article involves addressing a learning need, what you believe that others do not understand or what they are concerned about. Colleagues at work may help here, referring to what confuses them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the useful resources on this subject?</td>
<td>It is helpful to prepare an article knowing which other resources the reader can be referred to, perhaps through a learning activity. However, it is also important to remember that your article must still work as a coherent whole itself. Simply directing the reader to a series of other resources will not serve the reader well.</td>
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arranged haphazardly, for example writing about solutions before problems, writing about anatomy and physiology and then returning to it again later, or introducing a patient case study that is not referred to in the main text, the reader will find it difficult to follow the information.

The plan should include a description of what information will be shared with the reader and in what order, and the resources that will be used, for example references, figures or tables. It may be more appropriate to add the learning activities once the plan is established and sections are clearly defined. Learning activities should aim to extend, reinforce and within limits, diversify the learning associated with the article.

CPD articles may benefit from structuring as follows:

- Move from a problem to a solution.
- Move from cause to effect. For example, in a discussion of psychological support needs of patients with MI, you might write about the way in which chest pain and an associated increase in heart rate (the cause) results in anxiety and further workload for the heart (effect). A cycle develops, where anxiety increases the heart rate and leads to further angina.
- Clarify complex terms as you proceed.
- Discuss underpinning concepts first and the ones that rely on them later. For example, in the MI article example, the introduction would need to define psychological support before particular nursing responses such as answering questions or explaining how treatment works are discussed.
- Distinguish between that which is part of the essential explanation and that which represents additional knowledge. In the MI article, the essential explanation is about psychological needs at different stages of illness and the best nursing response. Information about other psychological support, perhaps provided by a patient support group, could be referred to in a learning activity.

- Ensure that each paragraph focuses on a clear subject and avoid long paragraphs. Complex paragraphs may be difficult to understand when the subject matter is new.
- Present points with regard for the assumed readership. If you are writing for less experienced nurses, avoiding jargon is important. If you are writing for specialist nurses, then it is important not to seem trite in the way you present points. Different journals have conventions on the terms of address, whether you refer to ‘you’ the reader in text or ‘the nurse’. In the author’s experience, writing using ‘you’ the reader has educational benefits in that it engages the reader more quickly and encourages reflection, but it is important to follow each journal’s requirements.

### Designing learning activities

Learning activities are sometimes misunderstood and often limited in design. They may be conceived solely as a check on comprehension. Activities are designed to test and reinforce readers’ knowledge by prompting a pause in reading, but they can also suggest further enquiry that will enhance learning associated with the article. Short learning activities:

- Look back now at the psychological needs of patients with myocardial infarction (MI) as they rehabilitate (focus). To what extent have you addressed these needs in patients that you have cared for? Do you think the patients were confident articulating their needs? (reflective question).
- Study Figure 2 and its explanation of how angina exacerbates patient anxiety, causing a cycle to develop (focus). How could you break this cycle? (question designed to prompt the reader to speculate).
- Considering what you have read so far (focus), list the factors that can increase the patient’s psychological discomfort when being admitted to hospital (an instruction – this learning activity is positioned in the text to work as a comprehension check).

Extended learning activities:

- Table 3 summarises the main psychological needs of patients with MI at different stages of their illness (focus). Show the table to your colleagues. Discuss whether the suggested psychological care responses in this article would be useful in their practice. What are the main concerns that remain unresolved? What seems possible now as a result of your discussion? (this learning activity is designed to provoke local discussion and it might suggest new care solutions, but also some further learning needs).
- Investigate the protocols that you use locally to care for patients during their recovery and rehabilitation following MI (instruction). To what extent do these address the psychological support needs highlighted in this article? (focus). Are there changes you could recommend when the protocol is updated? (question – this learning activity prompts a review of best practice locally, one that requires tact but is in keeping with practice update).
activities, those requiring a brief reflection or the answering of one or two reflective practice questions, are designed to be completed as part of the article reading. They are pause and reflect activities. Other activities, however, may be more comprehensive, where the reader is required to access a particular resource, observe something in practice or consult with colleagues (Box 1).

**Complete time out activity 6**

Reading a CPD article can take up to two hours. Therefore, an article with a completion time of four hours should include no more than two or at most three hours' learning activity, to include both the pause and reflect, and extended activities. For that reason, CPD articles should usually include only one extended learning activity. The learning activities are regularly, but not rigidly spaced so that the reader is encouraged to engage with all aspects of the teaching. Careful consideration has to be given to the type of learning activity (Table 2).

### Illustrations and resource boxes

Illustrations, for example figures, diagrams, photographs and tables, are important in CPD articles. They help to reinforce learning. For example, an article on interpreting complex fractures in X-rays should provide some images of those fractures. Illustrations will also appeal to the visual learning style of some readers, and may help to break up dense and complex text.

If you use illustrations other than your own, you will need to seek permission from the copyright holder (often the publisher) to include them in your article. You will also need to consult the journal policy on the type and number of illustrations permitted. You should ensure that all terms, measurements and scales presented in the illustrations are clear.

There is no reason why you should not create illustrations of your own. Simple figures, flowcharts or charts can quickly illustrate what you are explaining. Three or four illustrations will help to balance the text of an article. Make sure that each is referenced to the main text of your work and is given a title.

<table>
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<th>Table 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of learning activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine the case study and apply a theory or concept.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Find out what you do locally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss with your colleagues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore this website.</td>
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</table>
It is often a good idea to provide a resource box at the end of a CPD article detailing other reading, websites, forthcoming conferences or forums that are relevant and help extend the learning of the reader. Four or five further resources and a brief sentence explaining the value of each will suffice. When including website addresses (URLs), it is important to record these accurately. If the link is broken before your work is published, the copy editor will ask you to suggest an alternative.

Complete time out activity

**References**

Good referencing is important in all journal articles and you should refer to requirements in the journal’s author guidelines. In a CPD article, however, referencing is especially important. The CPD article often acts as a gateway to a series of enquiries, those that the reader might follow up on using the references that you cite or the websites that you recommend. While the CPD article itself might be associated with four to five hours of study, the readers’ examination of a chosen subject could extend beyond this. For this reason, and before you submit your CPD article for editorial consideration, it is important to check that you have selected the best and most up to date references available, particularly since the information you provide should be evidence based.

It is important to avoid using an older edition of a book if a more recent edition is available.

Make sure that you are clear about the source journal or text from where an article originates. If your reference comes from a chapter within a book, provide the author(s) and reference details to that, including page numbers, rather than send the reader to a collected volume of work. Make sure that your spelling of author names is consistent between the reference list and text and that the dates of publication marry up. It is frustrating for readers once enthused by your teaching to realise that it is then difficult to find particular referenced material.

Using appropriate references to acknowledge source material will help the author to avoid plagiarism. Using large numbers of quotes should be avoided and it is often best to paraphrase others’ work, providing your own insight and interpretation (Price 2014b).

**Conclusion**

CPD articles are designed to inform and educate readers and encourage further exploration of a particular subject. They tend to follow a set format and, therefore, require that the article is planned and structured in such a way that it engages the reader and information is easily readable. CPD articles will only be successful if you begin with a clear idea of what you wish to teach, identifying the purpose of the article and your motives for writing it. You also need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to be able to write the article. NS

Complete time out activity

**References**


