

Writing for journals

an avenue for professional development

Have you got something to share? Would you like to see your name in print?

Then read on and let

PAUL SWAN guide you

through the process of

writing an article for

APMC.

Teacher professional development is much more than simply attending a two hour workshop where an 'expert' shares a few good ideas to use in the classroom. Any sharing of ideas, whether it be informally over a cup of coffee in the staffroom or via the pages of a journal, such as this one, informs and hopefully, improves practice and as such, qualifies as professional development.

The advantage of journal articles is that they may be read several times by different readers, or by the same reader. One problem, however, is that while teachers may read articles in professional journals such as this one, they are often reluctant to write an article.

Writing as a form of professional development

The reluctance to write an article may stem from a number of reasons, including the belief that 'what I have to say isn't important'. It is important to overcome this feeling, because it is only by sharing that we can inform and improve current practice. It could be argued that writing a journal article is one of the best forms of professional development because it forces the author to reflect on his/her classroom experience and encapsulate just why this experience is worth sharing.

What would you like to share?

Decide what it is you want to share and start to gather information on the topic. For example you might like to share the outcomes from a successful lesson. To develop an article around the lesson you might like to include samples of children's work, copies of any worksheets used, photographs or reference to documents that assisted in the planning of the lesson.

For those who would like to share something from the classroom, the following set of suggestions should make the job a little easier. While most of the suggestions relate to the Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom (APMC), many of them may be applied to other professional writing.

Read other people's articles

Read several issues of the journal or publication. Get a feel for things like the average length of an article, the style of the article and the general layout. Don't worry too much about the specific layout of the page as a designer will do this part, but the designer is not responsible for providing photographs or diagrams. Photographs, diagrams and samples of children's work all help to break up the page and attract readers. Gough (1995) describes this process as 'getting to know your market'.

Some of the typical things that may be found in APMC are:

- Short practical articles – the sort of thing that a teacher might adapt for use in class;
- Theoretical research/implications;
- Reviews; and
- Issues impacting on primary maths.

Shorter is better

The APMC is a rather small journal – only 28 pages, so if an excellent 24 page article is submitted, it is highly unlikely that it will be published. Publishing one or two long articles would exclude others from being published in the same issue. Part of an editor's job is to ensure that all of the readers find something of interest in the articles, so the more articles, the more chance there is of reaching a wider audience. Most teachers are extremely busy and therefore, are more likely to read shorter, rather than longer articles, as these may be read in one sitting.

Getting started

Most teachers have something to contribute, but when it comes to putting pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, writer's block sets in. A few suggestions might help. Don't worry about a catchy title – that may be added later. Consider an issue or incident that impacts on teachers' work. Tripp (1993) uses a technique called critical incident analysis to tease out important facets. For example, watching children make words by turning a calculator upside down might cause one to reflect on the trivial nature of this exercise and may trigger further thought about making the best use of powerful tools such as calculators to enhance primary mathematics education.

Gough (1995) provides some starting points, these include:

- Remodelling an assignment written as part of a course;
- Professional development stories; and
- Success stories and the like that describe real classroom situations.
- Dilemmas – resolved or not!

Ask a friend to read your article

Ask a friend/colleague to read your article and to make constructive comments. The following checklist may be useful to consider when reading an article.

- Proof-read (i.e. look for typos and grammatical errors, free of discriminatory language and cultural bias).
- Consider the audience – will this appeal to others?
- Is the article clear and simple or verbose?
- Is the article free of jargon or acronyms familiar only to small audiences. Remember APMC is a national journal, so watch using terms familiar only to teachers in your state.

Remember, if you wait until the article is perfect, it will never be submitted.

Guidelines for submission

Most journals provide guidelines for submission. Often these are found on the inside cover of the journal. The guidelines for writing an article for APMC are as follows.

- The article should be typed, preferably word-processed on A4 paper.
- Use Times 12 point type.
- Use double spaced line spacing
- Only print on one side of the sheet.
- Number all pages figures and diagrams and photographs. Where names are to appear as a caption under a photograph, print the names in order in pencil on the back of the photograph.
- Simple styling is preferred, avoid underlining.
- Submit 3 copies and a floppy disk. The disk should be clearly labelled with the name of the author, type of computer platform (Mac or PC) and the program used.
- Include full personal details including phone and fax numbers and email addresses if applicable. Readers often like to contact authors to pursue issues with them.

Copyright issues

Plagiarism – the stealing of other people's ideas is frowned upon. There is nothing wrong, however, with taking an idea and reworking it, perhaps considering it from a different perspective or adding to it. For example, throughout this article, some of John Gough's ideas from an article called *You Can Write Too!* have been used. Diagrams are an area of concern. Pictures or diagrams photocopied or scanned from other publications are subject to copyright law. It is preferable to make original drawings using a computer package. If you are not proficient with a mouse you may like to complete a line drawing using a black artline pen. A large diagram that may be reduced is preferred.

Referencing

If you have quoted from another author's work, or paraphrased an idea, then acknowledge the source. Reference styles differ from journal to journal. APMC follows the style set by the American Psychological Association (APA). Look at the way references are used in the text of articles and at the end of articles in this issue of APMC. References should be clear enough so that persons interested in the topic could find the references in the library.

A bet each way

After putting so much effort into writing an article, it might be tempting to send it to more than one journal at a time. Don't. Choose one and wait for a reply. If the article is rejected, it may be reworked and resubmitted or sent to another journal.

What happens after an article is submitted?

Three copies of an article, along with a clearly labelled floppy disk containing the name of the person, computer type and programme should be sent to the journal editor(s). The editor(s) will acknowledge receipt of the article and will file one copy and send one or two copies to the editorial panel for review.

Members of the editorial panel will give feedback about the article and indicate whether it should be:-

- Accepted (perhaps minor changes such as typos need to be fixed).
- Accepted with changes – e.g. too long., cut down, add further explanation, rework conclusion etc.
- Rejected.

There could be several reasons for rejecting an article. It may be that the article was good, but did not suit the profile of the journal. For example, a very theoretical research article would be suited to a journal such as the Mathematics Education Research Journal and wouldn't be published in APMC. Likewise, an article on secondary maths wouldn't be accepted for publication in APMC but may be

used in the Australian Mathematics Teacher. Expect that the editors will also make some changes. Often these changes are made to improve the flow of the entire journal.

Who owns the copyright?

If the decision is publish the article, then the copyright is normally held by the journal that publishes the article, NOT the author. This means that you cannot simply change the title and publish it elsewhere. The idea, however, may be reworked and developed and used in other publications. Sometimes an article that appears in one journal may be reprinted in another. Even though the editors have the right to allow this, normally the author will be contacted out of courtesy to gain permission.

How much do I get paid?

Nothing, but the satisfaction of seeing your name and ideas in print is a fine reward. The article may be referred to on your Curriculum Vitae and you can gain a lot of kudos amongst your professional colleagues. Generally, most journals will send a complimentary copy to authors. This is certainly the case with APMC.

Where might I submit an article?

A list of primary mathematics journals published across Australia is given below.

Cross Section (WA primary and secondary)

c/o MAWA

PO Box 562, Claremont WA 6010

Square One (NSW Primary)

The Editor

Square One

PO Box 339, North Ryde, NSW 2113

Prime Number (Vic Primary)

c/o MAV

61 Blyth St, Brunswick VIC 3056

Please let us know whether you publish a Primary Mathematics Journal and we will publish details in the next issue.

References

Gough, J (1995). You can Write Too! In J. Wakefield and Velardi, L. *Celebrating Mathematics Learning*, pp 365–370. Brunswick, Vic: Mathematical Association of Victoria.

Tripp, D (1993). *Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgement*. London: Routledge.

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