

HOW TO GET YOUR AUDIT PUBLISHED



In this guide we look at how to share the results of your audit project externally by way of publishing your audit as a journal article.

Clinical Audit: “a quality improvement process that seeks to improve patient care and outcomes through systematic review of care against explicit criteria and the implementation of change”

A range of ‘How To’ guides have been produced by the UBHT Clinical Audit Central Office and are available on the UBHT Clinical Audit website, www.ubht.nhs.uk/clinicalaudit

Guides are cross-referenced using the insertion of the icon of other guides into the text to indicate where further information on the topic referred to can be obtained.



[What is Clinical Audit?](#)



[How to do Clinical Audit – a brief guide](#)



[How to choose and prioritise audit topics](#)



[How to involve patients in clinical audit](#)



[How to set audit objectives and standards](#)



[How to apply ethics to clinical audit](#)



[How to select an audit sample](#)



[How to collect audit data](#)



[How to analyse audit data](#)



[How to give an effective audit presentation](#)



[How to write an audit report](#)



[How to implement changes successfully](#)



[How to get your audit published](#)

Further information about Clinical Audit can be obtained by contacting the UBHT Clinical Audit Central Office on tel. (0117) 928 3614 or e-mail Eleanor.Bird@ubht.swest.nhs.uk

You can also get advice and support on clinical audit from your divisional Clinical Audit Facilitator (contact details available from the Central Office or UBHT clinical audit website)

Clinical Audit Workshops can be booked through the Clinical Audit Central Office

Advice on **Clinical Effectiveness**, including how to write guidelines, is available from James Osborne, Clinical Effectiveness Co-ordinator, tel. (0117) 928 3827 or <http://intranet/ce-net/> (UBHT network) or www.ubht.nhs.uk/ce-net (limited external version)

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You should be able to find examples of published audits in professional journals, including the BMJ (most recently styled as ‘Quality Improvement Reports’) and the Nursing Standard, to name just two.

You may have produced an excellent piece of work that others would benefit from hearing about. But how do you make the leap from distributing an audit report internally to making your mark as the author of a published piece of work?

The pointers in this booklet are equally relevant to any piece of work – audit or not – that you are hoping to see published.

What audits are published?

Editors are more likely to be interested in your piece of work if the methodology or lessons learned are generalisable - in publishing audit, it is the methodology that people can learn from, rather than the results (which won't usually be generalisable, like research). A re-audit, demonstrating how you have successfully improved practice, is therefore more likely to be published, with the BMJ going so far as to say it is unlikely it will publish a simple, ‘open loop’ audit (i.e. one without intervention and reaudit), because of the lack of relevance/importance to general readers.

Editors are also more likely to be interested in your piece of work if the topic is a ‘sexy’ one, for instance, a topic that is of current national interest and concern.

Which journal(s)?

How do you decide which journal to approach? Listed below are some tips on choosing a journal that is right for you and the audit you wish to publish:

- Journals have a target audience (usually obvious from journal title, but jobs pages will also give clues)
- Journal identity – serious, newsy, scientific? Can you write in that style?
- Who writes for the journal? Have a look at previous editions - what are the job titles of contributors?
- What topics have been covered previously? Can you add something new?

THE PROCESS OF SUBMITTING FOR PUBLICATION

1. Write your article

Some journals specify the format to be used. Check in the journal or on their website - most have guidance for contributors but if you can't find any, phone and ask.

Some general rules:

- Use clear, concise language. Don't use jargon
- Structure the article – give it a beginning, middle and end
- Obey the specified word limit
- Make sure you get your message across. What are the most important findings/ conclusions/ changes?
- If the subject is very specific, try to think of ways to generalise the findings
- Don't include judgmental phrases, e.g. “problem families”, “friendly but incompetent [families]”, “most of the money in the household went on drinking and gambling” (J Spence in a 1954 paper!)

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- Does the journal allow the use of graphs and tables? Check this before you write the article – tabulated data can save on your word count! Produce tables and graphs on a separate sheet, but explain where they go in the text
- Make sure your spelling and grammar are correct
- Include references, using the correct style for that journal – usually Vancouver or Harvard

2. Before submission

Before you send off your manuscript, you should check:

- Does the journal require an abstract? If not, your first paragraph needs to be really punchy to make the reader want to read on
- Accuracy - check your data and your references and ask someone to proof-read the finished article
- If you include any previously published material, you need written permission from the author and publishers before your article can be accepted
- Some journals require written ethics approval before they accept an article based on an audit project. You should check this with the journal, and if necessary contact the UBHT Research Ethics Committee for their advice (see '*How to apply ethics to Clinical Audit*')

3. Submit the article

- Send your article to the Editor (unless otherwise instructed). Use their name (check this before sending - it will be included in the staff listings of the journal). Make sure you send the article to the editorial office address
- Articles may be required in double spacing, as hard copy and/or on floppy disk – check what the journal's requirements are
- You should be aware that **you are only allowed to send the manuscript to one journal at a time** (to comply with copyright laws)

Articles should be submitted with a **front sheet**, which should include:

- Article title
- Author(s) - names should appear in order of input to article, not rank. NB. these details should be on the cover page only (for anonymous review)
- Contact details (main author) - address and telephone for home & work
- Name of person to whom any correspondence should be addressed

It may be useful to provide a **second sheet** with the following:

- Article title
- Introduction – summary or abstract (depending which journal and their style)
- Key points (gives editor a clue as to the content)

4. After submission

You should get an acknowledgement within a couple of weeks, so do ring the journal after that if you haven't heard. A decision will probably take 8 weeks or more.

You should either receive a rejection letter, or a letter from the editor asking for changes/rewrite, or an acceptance letter. It often takes up to six months to acceptance letter and maybe up to a year before the article appears in print – so be patient! Your printed article may be edited but you should be sent a proof copy to check before publication.

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Tell the Clinical Audit Department!

If you do get an article accepted or have a clinical audit project presented at a conference as a poster or talk, please let the Clinical Audit department know, so we can include this information in our Annual Report on the UBHT Clinical Audit programme.

Some references for further reading

“Writing for publication – a guide for new authors”, Dixon N, International Journal for Quality in Health Care 2001; Volume 13, Number 5, pp.417-421 (available online via www.nelh.nhs.uk/core_journals.asp if you have an Athens password)

“Advice to contributors to BMJ” at <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/advice/index.shtml>
In particular see <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/advice/checklists.shtml> for guidance on why papers might be accepted or rejected.

“Guidance for contributors to Nursing Times” at www.nursingtimes.net/nav?page=nt.help.story&resource=232243

“Author Guidelines for Nursing Standard” at http://www.nursing-standard.co.uk/professionaldevelopment/res_levelthree/authorguide.pdf

<http://www.mco.edu/lib/instr/libinsta.html> contains links to web sites which provide instructions for prospective authors for over 3000 journals