

## Speech & Language Therapy in Practice Guidance for critical friends

### 1. The challenge

*Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* is a magazine not a journal. Authors choose it because it is “practical” and “not as daunting as a journal” and “because therapists read it”. Readers also comment on its uniqueness: “it’s just so practical”. Our challenge is to maintain the features that make the magazine unique and popular – the focus on clients in context, and the opportunity to generate ideas for readers to think about – while introducing a form of peer review that

- a) helps readers with critical appraisal (“Why and how should this article lead me to change my practice?”)
- b) gives constructive feedback to authors that will benefit them now and in future projects
- c) enhances the overall quality of and confidence in the magazine.

### 2. The editing process

The vast majority of articles submitted to *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* are accepted with agreed additions and revisions. My editing is very ‘hands on’ which ensures a consistency of style and enables busy authors with good clinical skills but less developed writing skills to share their ideas. Decisions on style and whether to accept or reject an article lie with me. I offer my own feedback to authors and ask them to make changes or additions as necessary to make the article suitable for the *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* readership. Critical friends enable me to draw on a network of expertise across all areas of the profession at an appropriate stage. This may follow acceptance of the article on the understanding that it requires more work, but will more usually be after the article has been published. Very occasionally, on rejection of an article, I may ask critical friends to provide the author with constructive feedback so they can work towards re-submitting at a later date should they wish. Friends’ comments are also subject to editing, but will be approved prior to publication.

### 3. Standards and expectations

*Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* authors come from a variety of backgrounds. The majority are primarily clinicians, but some are academics and others are researchers. Occasionally joint authors include someone from another discipline such as a teacher or physiotherapist, and we have also had articles written by students and service users. Arguably this is one of the magazine’s greatest strengths as readers benefit from different perspectives, and first-time authors are encouraged to put pen to paper. In contrast to peer review for journals, it is very important that the ‘pitch’ of the article is acknowledged in the reviewing process; while the same *quality* standards will apply to all articles, the same *scientific* expectations will not.

### 4. An open process

In most cases – and in contrast to the accepted process for journals – our critical friends form of peer review will be open and involve collaboration between the author, the editor and the friends. If any friend thinks they may have a ‘conflict of interest’ they should advise the editor.

### **5. Reviewing style**

Your reviewing style should be positive, respectful, constructive and nurturing. It should encourage reflection among authors and readers and contribute to their continuing professional development. I prefer responses by e-mail attachment. You may wish to use the following as a framework, but it is not necessary:

- Why were you interested in the article?
- How does it fit with other things you have read or clinical discussions with colleagues?
- What particularly impressed and made a difference to you?
- Was there anything you wanted to hear more about?
- Did you follow up the references / suggested resources?
- Who would you recommend the article to?
- Are there any limitations, or things you think the reader needs to take into account?
- Do you have any comments relating to the editing rather than the author's content?

Friends do not need to have expertise on the topic of the article being reviewed, as one of the aims of the magazine is to see where developments in one field of the profession can be of use to another. If you have any concerns about an article's originality or ethics, please contact me to discuss.

### **6. Possible considerations**

If the article is based on research, you may wish to consider the following:

- importance of the article
- recency / appropriateness of cited articles
- the context - links to theoretical research / understanding of the nature of the condition under consideration
- design of the study in relation to its purpose
- the presentation of results and significant omissions (eg confidence intervals)
- the power of the study to draw conclusions (eg. in relation to sample size)
- the relation between the sample under consideration and the usual clinical population
- any risks to a clinical population if the findings are adopted too uncritically
- the variation(s) from current clinical practice.

### **7. What's in it for the reviewer?**

I really appreciate your willingness to give your time and expertise, and I hope you find the process helpful for your own professional development. On request, I will be happy to provide extra copies of any magazines featuring your reviews.

*Avril Nicoll*

*Editor – Speech & Language Therapy in Practice*

*1 June 2009*