

Prime¹ and

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a speech and language therapist in possession of a good idea must be in want of a publisher, as Jane Austen might have said. *Avril Nicoll* suggests that getting your work on paper requires the single-mindedness of a Mrs Bennet, the determination of a Mr Darcy and preferably the liveliness of a Lizzy - but, thankfully, not the skill of the *Pride and Prejudice* author.

¹ **prime** *v.tr.* equip (a person) with information etc.
² **predigest** *v.tr.* make (reading matter) easier to read or understand.
(Definitions from the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 8th ed.)

Predigest²

Read this

- if you
- have good therapy ideas
 - want to increase our evidence base
 - need inspiration to put pen to paper (or mouse to mat)



My first and very short-lived venture into publishing was as a 10 year old pupil at Eastern Primary School, co-producing the aptly named *Eastern Express* on a banda machine.

As a teenager I recall laboriously typing, cutting and pasting circulars then, as a young therapist, collaborating in the production of Backchat, a staff newsletter doomed because we took it a bit too far.

A recent perusal of my 'School days...Treasure Album' found the word 'journalist' cropping up over several years as my ideal career choice. Not until my final year at school does 'speech therapist' appear, so it is perhaps appropriate that the two areas are now combined in the editing and publishing of *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice*. A crucial part of this is inspiring other people to write up the work they are doing. Naturally, I turn to one of my own sources of inspiration, Jane Austen, for assistance.

"My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault - because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

As we do in speech and language therapy, I am constantly learning and improving on my editing skills. But is it possible that some people are simply not suited to writing? Ferguson & Mortensen (2002) point out that "we would not be in the business of therapy if we thought that language skills could not be developed, learned or enhanced. We often fail to recognise that we can shape our own language skills, as much as we can shape those of our clients." Time, confidence and practice are essential and inter-dependent elements of writing. As "research is not 'done' until it has appeared in writing" (Ferguson & Mortensen, 2002), accept that setting aside time for writing up your work is not only valid but crucial for the future of a profession working to increase its evidence base and avoid re-invention of the wheel. With a perceived lack of encouragement in the NHS to write up successful and unsuccessful projects - both equally important - clinicians have to be prepared to motivate themselves. Draw confidence from the writing you already do; look at case notes, reports

and user information and notice how you adapt the style to meet the needs of the different audiences. And practise, practise, practise: write a letter to a newspaper or the professional press, do a book or product review, or produce a newsletter for clients (Marsh & Brookes, 2002, item 4). If writing from scratch fills you with dread, get a colleague to interview you on tape about your project or case and use that as the basis of an article.

Listing the requirements of an accomplished woman:

"...and to all she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

What professional publications do you read? Who else is reading them, and are they people you are trying to influence for funding or to change practice? What 'level of evidence' or opinion and clinical experience is needed? Are they focused on a certain client group or for general consumption? Why would you want a particular article to appear in one rather than the other?

When you are planning to write up your work, producing the article before looking for somewhere to get it published is a bit like putting the cart before the horse. Every publication is operating in the market and depends on the uniqueness of its style and content for survival. Although you know your subject best, the editor knows what makes the readers come back for more and how the different aspects of the publication work together to make it what it is. Just before I started editing *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* I was asked by the editor of another magazine to write an article. Her evident disappointment when I had written the article I thought her readers would want rather than what she had asked me to do was a salutary lesson.

While this magazine is not above good-natured ribbing of the style of more august journals (Irvine, 2002), we should value the diversity of reading material available to our profession and make use of it to reach different audiences. Although you must observe the protocol that an article is not submitted to more than one journal without the express permission of the editors involved, it is acceptable to write up different aspects of the same piece of work to appeal to the different sectors.

When Lydia went away she promised to write very often and very minutely to her mother and Kitty; but her letters were always long expected, and always very short.

All publications have guidelines for authors which are essential reading before you write an article or do a book review (contact the relevant editor or see websites associated with the publication for a copy). Following the guidelines and being familiar with the style and content of a particular publication will greatly increase the chances of your article being accepted. The degree to which authors and editors work in partnership varies between publications. *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* has a flexible approach depending on the experience and wishes of the writer, and I am always happy to talk things through with potential authors at any stage. Make every effort to meet deadlines and do what has been agreed with the editor, but accept that the editor is coordinating the whole picture and may not be able to get back to you as quickly as you would like.

Elizabeth's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted Mr Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her. "How could you begin?" said she. "I can comprehend your going on charmingly when you had once made a beginning; but what could set you off in the first place?"

Getting started, keeping going and finishing an article all have their challenges. Lack of time is an obvious problem but may be an excuse for deeper fears we are reluctant to voice. What if it gets rejected? What if people think it's rubbish? What if the readers say they've been doing this for years and it's nothing new? What if I get hate mail? What if I get sued?

Well, what if we turn this on its head? The challenge of having an article accepted. The thrill of seeing your work in print. The congratulations from colleagues and even from therapists you don't know. The satisfaction of confirming the worth of standard practice, of inspiring therapists with new ideas, of motivating people to try something different. If we can look on publishing as a positive step and be supportive of those who have the courage to do it, how many more people will be willing to try their hand?

There are many ways to get started, so think about what will work for you. I was told recently that writer's block is as credible as speech and language therapist's block, and that it can be avoided by the discipline of setting aside time for writing on a daily basis. Getting something down on paper or on screen - what I refer to as scribbling - certainly works for me, always knowing that it is likely to change completely before it is finished. ▶



◀ Eighteenth century poet Edward Young reckoned, "Procrastination is the thief of time", but Winkworth (2002) sees it in a much more positive light, saying we should "accept the initial dithering as part of the process of nailing down what we mean." In an entertaining and insightful article she extols the virtues of talking aloud at every stage of the research process, even if there is no-one there to listen. Having discovered this at an early stage in my editing career I can vouch for its effectiveness, even if it raises a few eyebrows.

His letter was soon dispatched; for though dilatory in undertaking business, he was quick in its execution.

As well as talking it through, sleeping on an idea is often very productive. A recent interview with Newsnight presenter Kirsty Wark (*Good Housekeeping*, October 2002) revealed she is reliant on lists and even keeps a notebook beside her bed. Having deadlines - either real or self-imposed - help many people to keep going, and some people like to give themselves strict timetables. Experienced writers suggest a highly organised, bottom-up approach, starting with a skeleton and gradually padding it out. Another tells me she keeps her notes and observations in a file as she goes through her research, uses mind maps a lot and develops chapters and themes from them as the data begins to make some kind of sense. My preference is to have an idea, get as much down as possible, and then to edit ruthlessly both for content and order. I am therefore completely reliant on my computer for word processing and can only wonder at Jane Austen's tenacity with paper and pen.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

Jane Austen could hardly have guessed that the opening paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice* would become one of the best known in English literature. Speech and language therapists often write in the style of an academic essay as this has been their experience at undergraduate level. However, this means the best bits of an article are left until the end, which is pointless if the beginning is so uninteresting that people don't even start to read it.

Be prepared for the editor's intervention to spice up your introduction and, while writing your article, give thought to potentially memorable openings. These could be a question, a quote, a case example, an anomalous assertion, or a statement to make your readers think. In contrast, a punchy ending is unnecessary, particularly if it simply offers a summary of what has gone before.

"Charles writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest."

"My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them; by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents."

'First Impressions' was the original title of *Pride and Prejudice*. It may seem obvious but sloppy references,

spelling mistakes and frequent repetition give a poor impression of the value of the content. It is vital to focus on what you want to achieve and give attention to detail. A dictionary, thesaurus and book of quotations should never be far away and sources should be fully acknowledged (Bowen, 2002a).

When she read and re-read, with the closest attention,...again she was forced to hesitate.

...Widely different was the effect of a second perusal.

Ferguson & Mortensen (2002) explain the nature of the six drafts they believe are needed for a quality written product. Very roughly, these encompass: ideas and diagrams; logical sequencing; reworking and questioning; reading aloud; reading by someone else; and checking against style guidelines.

"...I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the éclat of a proverb."

Produce as good an article as you can, but focus on correction rather than the impossible goal of perfection.

"But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do what I think to be wisest; and now I hope you are satisfied."

Her aunt assured her that she was; and Elizabeth having thanked her for the kindness of her hints, they parted - a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point without being resented.

Develop a network of people who will comment on drafts of articles for you. I rely on family if I am unsure about a title for an article or usage of a word. Experienced writers find friendly but honest colleagues indispensable while drafting articles. Joint writing, either through taking responsibility for different sections, or having turns a draft at a time, is favoured by some. There are often local courses on writing for publication for NHS workers, and university lecturers and managers may also be willing to help you out with advice. For self-directed study, start with the online version of Bowen (2002b) and its useful links.

Speech & Language Therapy in Practice is not a peer reviewed publication. This formal process used in academic journals involves recognised experts in a field giving feedback on an article confidentially and anonymously via an editor. Comments from experienced writers suggest peer review can be a bit of a necessary evil. Be prepared for a slow process and try not to get demoralised if the feedback is not as constructive as you hoped.

A peer reviewer tells me she is looking for something which adds to the knowledge base in some form, has a clear rationale, concise introduction, a

5 steps to better practice

1. see writing for publication as an essential element of your work
2. familiarise yourself with potential publications
3. follow guidelines and meet deadlines
4. develop a network of people to assist you
5. get started, keep going, finish - then start all over again.

clear outline of methodology and results, and a discussion which relates these results to the existing literature in the field. She reads the paper and annotates heavily, re-reads it and collates the comments into coherent and constructive criticism. She suggests the first one or two attempts to publish in reviewed journals might be best

associated with an experienced researcher who can receive the review without being put off publishing, and can challenge any unfair comments. (And remember, even a manuscript such as *Pride and Prejudice* was originally turned down.)

"Tell your sister I am delighted to hear of her improvement on the harp, and pray let her know that I am quite in raptures with her beautiful little design for a table, and I think it infinitely superior to Miss Grantley's."
"Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again? At present I have not room to do them justice."

It is important to see comments and feedback from an editor in a positive light rather than taking them personally. I once wrote an article for a GP magazine and was quite insulted when the proofs came back with some of my words changed. It now said something I didn't mean but, if I had expressed it clearly enough in the first place, I would not have been misinterpreted. An editor can spot things you have missed, can ask the questions readers will inevitably ask, and can see opportunities to tighten up an article to make it more readable. Think of it as the relationship between a therapist and a client - the client knows most about themselves, while the therapist brings theoretical knowledge and experience with similar clients.

Now I have got some news for you," said Lydia, as they sat down to table. "What do you think? It is excellent news, capital news, and about a certain person that we all like."

Jane and Elizabeth looked at each other, and the waiter was told that he need not stay. Lydia laughed, and said, -

"Ay, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waiter must not hear; as if he cared! I daresay he often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But he is an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life."

The ethical side of publishing where clients are involved is something of a minefield, yet case examples are absolutely vital in bringing articles alive and making them meaningful to readers. It is very important that authors anonymise case information so that the clients cannot be identified from the article, at the same time keeping the information which will allow readers to decide whether or not to use the ideas with any of their own clients. Simply changing a name is not enough. For the avoidance of doubt, I would urge authors to discuss proposed articles with clients and ask for their consent.

..resources...resources..

Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters.

Getting that article e-mailed off (or posted if this is not possible) brings feelings of huge relief but, if people were happy that that was the end of it, we wouldn't have seen two 'sequels' to *Pride and Prejudice*. Be prepared to answer questions, find out more information, do some re-working and finally, after it is published, to deal with follow-up phone calls and the expectation of future tomes.

*"Shall you ever have the courage to announce to Lady Catherine what is to befall her?"
"I am more likely to want time than courage, Elizabeth. But it ought to be done; and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it shall be done directly."*

So, what are you waiting for?

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- Quotations from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen - my copy published by T. Nelson & Sons, Ltd. ■

Home Editions

Schools software publisher Topologika is making its products available to parents at a reduced rate of £19.99 or £24.99 inc. VAT. For further information on 'Home Editions' including Scally's World of Verbs, Speaking for Myself and Freddy Teddy Bumper Pack, ask for a catalogue.

Topologika Software, tel. 01326 377771, www.topologika.com.

Experiences of autism

The National Autistic Society has published a book containing a collection of poems, pictures, stories, photographs, drawings and paintings by people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families, friends and professionals as part of its 40th anniversary celebrations.

Autism. The problem is understanding (ISBN 1 899280 38 3), tel. 01268 522872.

Diabetes and stroke

A free pack provides information on recognising the symptoms of diabetes, as the link between diabetes and stroke makes it crucial it is properly diagnosed and controlled. The pack also provides information on how to reduce your risk of a stroke if you have diabetes. Diabetes is common and on the increase, and can double or triple your risk of suffering a stroke.

Free from The Stroke Association, tel. 020 7566 0317, www.stroke.org.uk.

Aphasiahelp

London Connect staff and service users have been involved in the development of a website designed to be both accessible and informative to people with aphasia. Comments are welcome.

View the prototype at www.aphasiahelp.org.uk and send feedback to beckymoss@ukconnect.org.

Have you Bookstarted yet?

A revamped Bookstart website contains general information and advice for parents, and information on best practice, research and resources for professionals.

The Bookstarters bi-monthly newsletter, available by e-mail, contains many snippets of use to speech and language therapists working with children. The Nov/Dec issue included an update on Bookstart's penetration in the UK, feedback on projects in libraries in Los Angeles and a report of a new link with Mantra, a dual language children's publisher.

www.bookstart.co.uk / www.booktrust.org.uk

Pulse oximetry

A stand-alone pulse oximeter with a battery life of 15 hours and a data memory capacity of 160 hours is aiming to offer flexibility of use in hospital and in homes.

OxyTrend, see www.draeger-medical.com

Don Johnston

Products making their first appearance in the 2003 Don Johnston sourcebook include the FEAT (Functional Evaluation of Assistive Technology) for use with pupils with learning difficulties, and individual phonics instruction from Simon S.I.O.

Don Johnston aims to design interventions that use technology to help build skills, provide scaffolds, support the curriculum and make options available for computer access.

www.donjohnston.com

Keep signalonging

New manuals from Signalong are The Multisensory Room (£12.50) and Sounds (£12.50) from the Learning Through Sensory Experience series, and two topic books, We're Going to the Zoo (£15.50) and What Shall I Wear Today? (£12.50).

www.signalong.org.uk

Intervoice

An internet site for the international exchange of information in the voice therapy field has had a re-vamp.

Intervoice is accessible in English, Spanish and German and includes updates on new technology, job and work experience adverts and a discussion forum.

www.intervoice.de

HIV news

A weekly HIV e-news service is now available for people living with HIV or interested in the latest HIV news and treatment information. The service is provided by the website World Aids Day Gay.com and HIV publication Positive Nation.

To subscribe, go to <http://luk.gay.com/newsletter/>

Staff discount

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www.nhsdiscounts.com