



## IDEAS AND INFLUENCES

### A 30-day writing challenge

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A 30-day writing challenge was developed as a precursor for two nurses embarking on a research journey. The idea for the writing challenge came from the work of Tara-Nicholle Nelson, creator of the '30-day writing challenge for conscious leaders' ([taranicholle.com](http://taranicholle.com)). This idea was supported by knowledge of the importance of allowing learners to create their own insights and understanding by engaging in creative activities. Journal writing has historically featured widely in the literature as an effective tool for developing self-awareness (Cornish and Cantor, 2008; O'Connell and Dymont, 2013). The hope was to stimulate self-reflection, which would lead to a sense of self-worth and belief that conducting research was achievable.

The writing challenge asked exploratory questions surrounding beliefs about research, previous nursing experiences, values and perceptions of self. A daily purposeful question provided the structure for capturing thoughts and experiences. Finding a way to create a space in which the nurses could make sense and meaning from their words and thoughts was important (Dewey, 1997; O'Connell and Dymont, 2013). Both nurses were able to gain an appreciation for their own skills and knowledge and this led to a realisation that they had already been engaging in research and could make valuable contributions to the project.

The following provides insights into the questions the nurses felt were most valuable in preparation for their upcoming research journey. They have been identified as co-authors 1 and 2.

#### Co-author 1 (KB)

*Q. Write about your best attributes and how they will help you in this research journey*

I was able to identify four key attributes that I believed could help me on my journey: organised, calm, motivated and enthusiastic. Whenever I began to feel stressed or overwhelmed I would go back to my journal and read what I had written to remind myself that I did have the attributes and confidence to continue.

*Q. List the things you hope to achieve by being involved in research*

As a clinical nurse I felt stressed and overwhelmed about the whole process. Writing about what I hoped to achieve led me to reflect on my values and beliefs about being a nurse. This confirmed my

belief that the reason I love being a nurse is to make a difference to the care of our patients. It helped to alleviate some of the stress, knowing what I was involved in could make a difference.

*Q. Write about the best things about being a nurse*

I loved this question. I was able to reflect on all my experiences over the years, the patients and colleagues who have moulded me into the nurse I am today. Writing my stories helped me to feel grateful for everything that nursing brings, especially the opportunity to be involved in research.

#### **Co-author 2 (TG)**

*Q. List the things that challenge you about writing*

My biggest fear was that I would not be able to contribute anything worthwhile. Acknowledging my fears about the writing challenge was quite powerful and helped me to feel brave in discussing this with the other researchers. I was relieved to find I was not alone in my fears and this led to discussions about support for one another during the project.

*Q. List the things you hope to achieve by being involved in research*

My initial hope was quite simply getting a proposal written that others would value. As I reflected it helped me to understand the important role I have as a clinical nurse in contributing to research. It gave me a real sense of pride that I could be involved in making a difference to patient care and at the same time create outcomes that could be shared with other healthcare professionals.

*Q. Write about the best things about being a nurse*

Touching people's lives in the way we do is something most people never experience and is something truly special about being a nurse. Writing about these experiences it became very clear that my most treasured moments have been my involvement in the Essentials of Care programme. My learning from this has given me belief and realisation that I have the ability to be involved in research; without being a nurse I would not have these opportunities.

#### **Conclusion**

The 30-day writing challenge provided a stimulus for reflective writing. Although at times this was challenging and pushed the nurses out of their comfort zones, it led to new insights and a deeper understanding about their abilities and contributions as researchers. The habit of writing daily was described as an enriching experience that led to confidence and self-belief. This has encouraged both nurses to continue to write about their personal research journeys.

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