

# How to Write for Your Profession

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In the January issue of *Journal of AHIMA*, health information professionals were asked to take action by highlighting their work and the value of the health information management (HIM) profession through publishing. Yes, this is a big ask—but it is necessary and is an ask that most HIM professionals already have the knowledge and expertise to fulfill.

If you're still not convinced that publishing is for you, let's revisit the key questions you should ask yourself to help with your decision-making process:

- Do I have a particular area of interest or expertise in a topic area?
- Could others benefit from my knowledge?
- Is there a gap between my knowledge and what's happening in practice?
- Do I want to grow professionally?

If you are reading this article it is likely you answered “yes” to at least one of those questions, which means you have valuable knowledge that needs to be shared.

## Researching the Topic

Any good writing project requires research to back it up. While exploring topic ideas it is important to choose one that is researchable. To make that determination, consider these questions in relation to your topic:

- Is the topic practical and useful?
- Is this a topic that has already been researched? If so, how will that research support the topic angle I am pursuing?
- How will my research add to the body of knowledge already available? Will it contribute anything new to the body of knowledge?
- What is the scope of my research? (If it's too broad, you may be overwhelmed with information, and if it is too narrow, you may have trouble finding resources.)
- Will I be able to garner support from the people/organizations required to complete the research?
- Does pursuit of this topic align with my personal and professional goals and interests?
- Do I have the time and access to the resources needed to complete the research?<sup>1</sup>

Once your topic has been determined, conduct a review of the literature. A literature review is a written summary and analysis of journal articles, books, and other documents that describe the past and current state of information related to a topic.<sup>2</sup> The literature review will help to refine a topic, determine what others have written about it, and support the need for your work.

The obvious place to begin your review of the literature is at the library. Consider visiting a local library either in your community, at your place of employment, or at an academic institution. Ask the librarian for assistance—their knowledge of key word searches and available resources is invaluable.

Of course, the internet provides even easier access to needed resources. One example is Google Scholar, a free search engine that searches scholarly literature and academic resources—much like the sort of searches one would conduct at the library (<https://scholar.google.com>). PubMed is another free resource that is developed and maintained by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) through the US National Library of Medicine (NLM) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). PubMed is composed of citations for biomedical literature, life science journals, and online books, and it also provides access to additional relevant websites and links: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK3827/#pubmedhelp.PubMed\\_Quick\\_Start](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK3827/#pubmedhelp.PubMed_Quick_Start).

If you are a member of a professional association, such as AHIMA, be sure to take advantage of the wealth of information they provide. For example, AHIMA's HIM Body of Knowledge provides its members with quick and easy access to

resources, tools, and links in an effort to support the advancement of HIM professional practice and quality healthcare (<http://bok.ahima.org>).

As you conduct your research, keep an eye out for open access journals. These are journals that provide online access to research articles free of cost and without a subscription. One example of an open access journal is JAMIA Open, which is the American Medical Informatics Association's (AMIA) online peer-reviewed open access journal (<https://academic.oup.com/jamiaopen>). An excellent resource for finding open access journals is the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), an online directory that indexes and provides access to peer-reviewed open access journals (<https://doaj.org>).

## Selecting a Publication

An important aspect of the research and writing process is selecting the appropriate publication to submit your work. At the highest level, authors must decide whether to publish in scholarly or non-scholarly publications. Scholarly publications (often referred to as peer-reviewed publications) are those that are peer-reviewed by other professionals, while non-scholarly publications are not peer-reviewed. Typically, the peer reviews are done in a double-blind fashion, meaning that the author does not know the identity of the reviewer(s) and the reviewer(s) and editor(s) do not know the identity of the authors. This is done to safeguard the integrity of the publishing process by reducing personal bias and demonstrates the quality of the research. The authors and reviewers follow a formal process for submission and review, and the reviewers ultimately decide to accept or reject the manuscript submission.

There are countless publications where HIM professionals have the opportunity to publish their work. Part of the mission of AHIMA is to provide members with the opportunity to grow professionally, which includes publishing works/articles by members and allowing them the chance to share their professional knowledge with other members and the general healthcare industry. In support of that mission, AHIMA has multiple scholarly publications. Perspectives in Health Information Management (PHIM) is AHIMA's scholarly research journal, and is available at <http://perspectives.ahima.org>. It has a mission to "advance health information management practice and to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between HIM professionals and others in disciplines supporting the advancement of the management of health information," according to its website. Educational Perspectives in Health Informatics and Information Management (EPHIIM) is AHIMA's scholarly research journal focused on teaching and learning in the HIIM discipline, and is available at <http://eduperspectives.ahima.org>. Scholarly journals provide many different manuscript categories. PHIM, for example, allows authors to submit research studies, case studies, opinion essays, systematic reviews, and commentary.

AHIMA has additional opportunities for scholarly publication beyond the traditional journal article. Both the annual AHIMA Conference and the AHIMA Assembly on Education, for example, provide professionals the opportunity to submit abstracts to speak at the conference on "vital HIM issues in the context of an ever-changing and challenging environment."<sup>3</sup> The abstracts are peer-reviewed. Most conferences also allow for submission of research posters.

One last example of scholarly work relates to publishing educational case studies. AHIMA's Course Share that is housed by the AHIMA Academy provides professionals the opportunity to develop case studies and use cases that can be adopted and used in formal academic training to meet specific competencies. The curricular elements are peer-reviewed ([www.ahima.org/courseshare](http://www.ahima.org/courseshare)).

In addition to scholarly publishing opportunities, there are countless ways to publish materials in non-scholarly publications. The purpose of these publications is to share information with a large general population and the review process does not include peer review. AHIMA has several opportunities for these types of publications, the most notable of which is the *Journal of AHIMA*. The *Journal of AHIMA* serves as a professional development tool for health information managers. It keeps readers current on issues that affect the profession and contributes to the field by publishing best practices and new knowledge. Part of the magazine's mission is to provide members a voice to share their best practices and new knowledge. The *Journal* is just one way members and the HIM industry can share knowledge and best practices. This journal is a trade publication and has a large readership. In addition to the magazine, the *Journal of AHIMA* website, found at <http://journal.ahima.org>, offers original content not found in the print version. Opportunities to write articles for the *Journal* website are also available, as are opportunities to write for the numerous *Journal* website blogs on topics like coding and clinical documentation improvement.

AHIMA publishes Practice Briefs—focused papers on various topics—in its AHIMA HIM Body of Knowledge. There are also numerous speaking opportunities with conferences, webinars, workshops, etc. that do not require peer review for publication.

Finally, authors have the ability to publish in other formats, such as books or book chapters. These types of publications afford authors the opportunity to delve deeply into specific content around their expertise. AHIMA Press publishes books covering a wide range of HIM topics.

## Submitting Your Work

Regardless of the publication type, there are a few questions authors need to ask before deciding on where to submit their work:

1. Is the topic a good fit for the publication? This is not an exact science, but authors can review the previously published works of a publication to get a sense of whether there is alignment. There are some interesting tools that will identify probable journals based on keywords, such as <http://jane.biosemantics.org> and [www.journalguide.com](http://www.journalguide.com).
2. Does the publication's timeline and process align with the author's? Publications vary in their frequency of publication (quarterly, annually, bi-annually, etc.) so it is important to identify a source that aligns with your goals.
3. What do you want to accomplish with your publication? If producing generalizable research findings is a goal, this will guide your publication decision.

In short, AHIMA's priority is to offer members and the industry an open voice to share information and best practices, whether that is through writing articles, giving presentations at event meetings, or sharing collaboratively with others through Engage. If you're interested in authoring a publication for AHIMA, start by looking at AHIMA's full list of publications and consider submitting: [www.ahima.org/about/communications](http://www.ahima.org/about/communications).

## Notes

1. Creswell, John and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Third Edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015.
2. Ibid.
3. AHIMA. "AHIMA19 Health Data and Information Conference: Call for Abstracts." 2018. <https://ahima.confex.com/ahima/91am/cfp.cgi>.

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