It is fascinating to me to study the manuscripts that come across my desk as Editor of The American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT®). The topics addressed are extremely varied; in any one day, I might receive manuscripts that focus on topics as disparate as children with autism, occupational therapy on an organ transplant unit, the meaning of playfulness, and heterosexual discourse in the clinic. The richness of the work in our field is apparent.

The Author's Guide is published in the January/February issue of the journal and is available on the AJOT Web page. The intent of the guide is to give writers fairly detailed information about expectations for style and content of manuscripts submitted to the Editor. Additionally, the masthead page of each issue contains a purpose statement for the journal. It is with this mission or purpose in mind that the reviewers and the Editor arrive at judgments about the acceptance or rejection of a manuscript. The quality of the research, the relevance and importance of the topic to the profession, and the quality of the written product are all considered as they relate to the suitability of the paper for publication in AJOT.

I have already observed a few recurring manuscript "problems" that warrant some discussion. I will address one of these concerns here and others in future From the Desk of Editor columns. There seems to be a moderate trend among authors in our field toward writing up research in the form of a sequence of papers (Part 1, Part 2, etc.) rather than as a single paper that reports the whole of a study. I can think of at least two major reasons why this is not necessarily a good idea. First, although it is appropriate and legitimate to publish more than one paper from a study, the way this is accomplished can be somewhat tricky. Each paper must, in its own way, represent and maintain the integrity and wholeness of the study. For example, from my own research study on day-care staff satisfactions and dissatisfactions in caring for persons with dementia, I have, thus far, published three papers (each in a different journal). In one paper, I focused on the everyday ethical dilemmas in the data (Hasselkus, 1997); in the second paper, I focused on the uncertain endings of day care described in the data (Hasselkus & LaBelle, 1998); and in the third paper, I focused on the nature of occupation in the data (Hasselkus, 1998). Each paper required its own (though overlapping) literature review, its own analysis of the data, and its own generation of findings and discussion. However, each was drawn from the study as a whole, starting with all data. I did not report the first part of the study in one paper (e.g., literature review, method), a second part of the study in another paper, and so forth. Each paper represented a different analysis of the whole.

For another study, in which I measured hand joint changes in persons with rheumatoid arthritis, I published two articles (again, in two different journals)—one on the instrument development (Hasselkus, Kshepakaran, Houge, & Plautz, 1981) and the other on the findings from the measurements taken with the instrument (Hasselkus, Kshepakaran, & Safrit, 1981). This example is, in some ways, similar to writing up stages of a study, but a wholeness or integrity of each "part" is preserved. Larger studies may certainly lend themselves to such an approach. I suggest, however, that in this latter situation, the articles need to stand alone. Additionally, it would be wise to submit the papers to different journals rather than to attempt to get some kind of a sequence in one journal (see discussion in next paragraph). The large, multi-phased study by Clark and her colleagues at the University of Southern California is an example of the success of this approach (Clark et al., 1997; Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998).

A second reason for not dividing a study into several sequenced manuscripts is this: Journal pages represent carefully guarded and planned-for space. It is rare that an editor would be comfortable
devoting several “slots” in one issue of a journal to articles that are all derived from the same study and are all by the same author. Additionally, the articles themselves are likely to seem fragmentary and incomplete because the author often, in each paper, refers the reader to the other papers for clarification, more detail, and so forth. This is not to state that two-part or three-part papers are never appropriate for publication in a journal; rather, they are very rarely appropriate. A two-part or three-part article in AJOT would need to be from a study that is foundational to occupational therapy or the study of occupation and one with far-reaching implications for the theory and practice of the profession. An example that comes to mind is a two-part article by Kielhofner (1982a, 1982b) published in The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research. I would urge any author who is considering developing a series of papers from a study to contact the editor at the start to discuss the feasibility and acceptability of such an approach for the journal of your choice.

On another matter, I want to report two more changes in the organization of AJOT. Linda TickleDegnen, PhD, OTR/L, has been named the Associate Editor for Evidence-Based Practice. Under her leadership, a new journal department will be developed to provide an evidence-based practice forum in which ideas, interpretations, and discussions about the concept of evidence-based practice can be brought to the attention of the profession. It is our hope that this forum will help to increase our understandings and our use of this vital component of research and practice in occupational therapy and that this new visibility will help clinical practitioners begin to make the appropriate conceptual links between research evidence and clinical practice.

Finally, Patricia Trossman, EdD, OTR, FAOTA, is the Associate Editor for Book Reviews. Previously, the book review process has been coordinated by the American Occupational Therapy Association National Office. We will be making an effort to publish reviews of books in groups according to topic. For example, a reviewer will be asked to develop a comprehensive review of two or three books related to rehabilitation after spinal cord injury; comparisons and synthesis of the books will be incorporated into the published review. The objective of this approach is to offer readers comparative commentary and evaluations of new books in the field.

References


