
An Editorial Perspective on Authoring Papers

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What do Journals Seek?

- Journals and their editors seek original articles that are novel, important, informative and ethical.
- Editors seek papers that are free of commercial or intellectual bias.
- In an increasingly digital age, it is important that work be timely and adherent to principles of trial registration and conduct.

An Important Paper

- Provides data that will affect practice, or will delineate an underlying process.
- The study should add appreciably, not just incrementally, to available data.
- The conclusions should follow from the data and optimally provide clear direction.

An Ethical Paper

- An ethical paper that involves human subjects should include guarantee
 - adequate informed consent was obtained
 - a minimum number of subjects were put at risk

Authorship: Definition and Responsibilities

- Publication in a medical journal has major implications for authors, the medical community and for society. It lead to financial outcomes, as well as health outcomes:
- An author -- contributed substantially to a submitted paper --- intellectual participation, performing studies, writing.
- Many journals ask specifically for exact contributions. Others just require statements of “contributorship.”
- The days of listing people as authors on papers as a courtesy are largely over.

Redundant or Duplicate Publication

- Definition: publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published.
- The bases of this position are international copyright laws, ethical conduct, and cost-effective use of resources.

Secondary Publication: When is it OK?

- Authors have received approval from the editors of both journals.
- Priority of primary publication is respected.
- Paper for secondary publication is intended for a different group of readers; an abbreviated version could be sufficient.
- The secondary version faithfully reflects the data and interpretations of the primary version.
- The footnote on the title page of the secondary version indicates that the paper has been published in whole or in part and states the primary reference.

Industry Sponsored Trials

- Editors need to know:
 - Who sponsored the study
 - Authors' financial relationships with the sponsor
- Editors need to be assured that authors had a substantive role in trial design, data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation.
- This requires authors to be both independent and accountable.

Journals Ask for Trial Registration

- Journals ask that clinical trials be registered in a data base for several reasons
- Registration enables readers to verify that what is going to be reported is what was initially planned.

Trials must be registered as follows:

- Any Phase 2 or higher trial enrolling patients beginning July 1, 2005
- Registration required BEFORE enrolling patients
- Ongoing trials should have been registered before September 13, 2005
- Exceptions are presently considered on a case by case basis
- Phase 1 trials may need to be registered in future

What do Journals Really Seek?

- The *first* paper
- The *best* paper to date
- The *last word* on something

Most journals that use peer review rely on review as consultation.

The ultimate decision is editorial

Authors DO's and DON'Ts

- DO's
 - Identify an interesting and focused question, for which positive or negative result of interest
 - Enlist advice of others in study design
 - Attend up front to feasibility, power, potential methodological limitations
 - Determine authorship early
 - Start writing early, and have others provide comments on drafts
 - Target to appropriate journal, and be willing to revise and submit elsewhere.

Authors DO's and DON'Ts

- DON'Ts
 - Don't make claims of priority (“This is the first..”)
 - Don't include a comprehensive review of the literature (Manuscript should have 30-35 references max) – focus on directly relevant data
 - Don't make your focus a criticism of other studies (Those authors may be reviewing your paper!)
 - Don't ignore or be overly defensive re: limitations
 - Don't speculate excessively
 - Don't over-reach regarding implications of your results (Conclusions should follow logically from the results)

Starting to Write: Timing

- Avoid waiting for all the data to be in and analyzed!
- Start early with Introduction and Methods
- Plan major tables/figures; prepare these next once data available, followed by text of Results, Conclusions, Abstract

General Guidelines

- Length -- 15 pages or less
 - Title page (1)
 - Abstract (1)
 - Introduction (≤ 1)
 - Methods (~4-5)
 - Results (~3)
 - Discussion (3-4)

Introduction

- DO
 - Summarize briefly key background information that makes the study question important
 - Final sentence(s) should make clear the hypothesis you are studying (e.g., we designed a multicenter randomized trial to assess whether x is superior to y for the treatment of z...)
 - Usual length no more than a page (+/-)

Introduction

- DON'T
 - Don't provide a detailed literature review of the history of work in the area (if you have 40 refs. in the Intro, it is too much!)
 - Don't assume that readers (many of whom will be outside your field) will know why the question is relevant
 - Don't use jargon (especially when writing for general audience)

Methods

- DO include clear description of:
 - Primary and secondary aims (Should be clearly distinguished from post-hoc hypotheses)
 - Study design
 - Subjects (inclusion/exclusion criteria)
 - Data collected (including details of assays where relevant)
 - Statistical analysis (tests used; criteria for statistical significance; power/sample size calculation)

Methods

- DO
 - Include statement re: IRB approval and informed consent.
 - For industry sponsored trials, need to be clear re the role of industry-- Note who (company versus non-industry authors) designed the study, collected the data, held and analyzed the data, wrote the manuscript, controlled the decision to publish; indicate explicitly whether investigators had full access to the data

Methods

- DON'T
 - Don't leave out critical details (not sufficient to refer to another publication for important information- e.g., subject characteristics, etc)
 - Don't be too wordy

Results

- DO
 - Think through which results are critical to show in detail
 - Present all relevant results in the results section
 - Use tables and figures to summarize findings
 - Include a table with subject characteristics (“Table 1”)
 - Make clear main findings in the text, with reference to the tables and figures .

Results

- DON'T
 - Don't repeat all the numbers in the tables in the text
 - Don't include irrelevant data just because you collected them
 - Don't leave out results that you don't like!

Discussion

- DO
 - Start by summarizing your main findings (1 paragraph)
 - Put these findings in context of relevant prior work
 - Note implications (1-2 paragraphs)
 - Address limitations
 - ?possible confounding or bias, ?small study or short follow up? Limited power for certain analyses? etc..
 - Where possible, note available data to suggest these are not major flaws...
 - Conclude with concise summary
 - Cover these points in no more than 4 pages

Discussion

- DON'T
 - Don't make claims of priority (“This is the first..”)
 - Don't include a comprehensive review of the literature (Manuscript should have 30-35 references max) – focus on directly relevant data
 - Don't make your focus a criticism of other studies (Those authors may be reviewing your paper!)
 - Don't ignore or be overly defensive re limitations
 - Don't speculate excessively
 - **Don't over-reach regarding implications of your results** (Conclusions should follow logically from the results)

Abstract

- Background –why you did the study (1-2 sentences)
- Methods-- brief summary of the study design, population, what was measured (2-3 sentences)
- Results- Summarize major findings, with numbers/p values (3-4 sentences)
- Conclusions- Major take home point(s) (1 sentence)
- Overall \leq 250 words

Preparing for Submission

- Identify appropriate journal
- Follow instructions for authors
- All authors must meet criteria for authorship and must have signed off on manuscript
- Make editors aware/provide copies of related publications
- Address potential “conflicts of interest”

Cover Letter

- DO:
 - Briefly note relevance of the study (why should the journal want to publish this) and key findings
 - Include statements re authorship, and that not published elsewhere
 - Ok to provide suggestions for reviewers and also to note person(s) whom you prefer not review (in moderation..)

Revision Process

- A letter that says something to the effect of “We are sorry to say that your manuscript was not accepted for publication. However , if you wish to submit a substantially revised manuscript that is responsive to the concerns of the reviewers and editors, we would be willing to consider it.....(without commitment..) ”

IS OFTEN GOOD NEWS

Revision Process

- DO:
 - Address ALL concerns of the reviewers and editors.
 - Include a detailed cover letter noting each point made by editor/reviewers, followed by statement on how you dealt with it (include page number..)
 - Show all co-authors revised version and give opportunity for further input.
 - Aim to do quickly

Revision Process

- DON'T
 - Don't simply write that you “have revised the paper” without providing point by point summary
 - Don't ignore comments because you consider irrelevant
 - Don't make revised paper overly long or wordy
 - If you cannot do something that editors request (eg request for more data..), worth asking editor if still makes sense for you to revise (versus submit to another journal)

Appeals

- Generally low probability of success
- If you feel that study was unfairly reviewed, or that rejection was on the basis of something that is addressable, consider contacting journal regarding interest in resubmission
- Positive reviewer comments are not sufficient grounds for appeal

What should you, as an author, expect ?

- Speed \Rightarrow Expeditious decisions
- Editorial rigor \Rightarrow Quality and clarity
- The credibility of the content + the independence and integrity of the source \Rightarrow Value as place to publish
- Journal reputation \Rightarrow Value as place to be an author

What More Should Authors Should Expect

- Fair assessment.
- Confidentiality.
- Timely review.
- Clarity about submission requirements.
- Clarity about publication timing.
- Special requests?

The likelihood of publication (where you would like) relates to:

- The question you set out to study
- The study methodology (design, data collection, analysis...)
- How you present your findings

Three Major Reasons for Rejection

- **Quality:** The science is flawed
- **Novelty:** The science is good, but has previously been published or does not advance the field
- **Specialty:** It's good, but not of general interest and belongs in a specialty journal

For the last two reasons, journals sometimes disagree with reviewers