

How to Get Published

John Beard with tips from two editors

Simon Chapman (*Tobacco Control*)

Barry Pless (*Injury Prevention*)

Why publish?

- To make a difference
 - “If it wasn’t published it was never done”
- To progress in the academic environment
 - “publish or perish”
- To have your work endorsed by peer review
- Make examiners more confident of the contents of your thesis

The Editor's Perspective

- The ISI Impact Factor indicates how often articles in a certain journal are cited within the two years of the publication date. This makes it one of the most powerful measures of journal prominence and drives journal behaviour.
- Journals consider will anyone ever cite this paper? Or will it be a dead weight on our impact factor, no matter how "worthy"?
- Heavily cited: reviews; highly original papers; papers that receive high press attention

The Publishing Environment

- 100s, sometimes 1000s papers received each year (BMJ 6500).
- Acceptance rates typically 5%-30%
- Papers are rejected at three stages:
 - without review (circa 50%)
 - after review (circa 45%)
 - after revision (circa 5%)

Keys to getting published

- Good quality research
- Target appropriate journal
- Covering letter
- Writing techniques
- Time

Target Your Paper at a Particular Journal

- Familiarise yourself thoroughly with potential journals – where do most of the papers you cite come from?
- What sort of papers do they publish? (OAs, briefs, reviews, commentaries, iconoclastic pieces?)
- What is the “culture” of the journal?
- National or international focus?
- Write for that journal
- Ambition vs realism

Is This the Right Journal for Your Paper?

- Many papers submitted suggest authors have never read the journal.
 - Language
 - Style
 - Culture
- Clue to likely desperation (ie rejected many times before) or that authors are not cutting-edge/up to speed

Is Your Paper a Paper, a Brief or a Research Letter?

- Easier to get letters & briefs accepted (space). They are indexed!
- Decide whether you should submit it as a brief or letter

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Covering Letter

- Why is your paper special?
- What is new about it?
- How does it relate to the journal's readership?
- How does it relate to the journal's past publications and style?
- Is it likely to influence others?

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Preliminaries: Abstract & Title

- **ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL – NOT AN AFTERTHOUGHT!!!**
- **structure abstract if so required**
- **make it tell the whole story**
- **tell it well; may be all that is seen**
- **will influence editor**
- **title: choose with care (not too clever)**

"I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one"

Mark Twain

The Introduction

- **construct as an inverted pyramid**
 - **move from broad statement to rationale for the study: why this study**
- **catchy opening sentence**
- **keep it short**
- **review literature selectively**
- **justify your study in light of above**
- **end with sharp focus: hypothesis, question**

METHODS

Provide Details

- Enough to permit replication; or to assess validity of findings; quality of study
- Tell the story: "To assess xyz, we did the hoodgie-wadjie procedure, using Blatz technique (3)"
- if new measures or procedures, describe in detail in appendix, or from authors

RESULTS

Portray...

- build from the graphics (which must be good and able to be understood without reference to text)
- use figures sparingly
- learn when to use a pie chart, bar chart, etc.
- tell the story briefly ("we found that...")
- consider photos

DISCUSSION/INTERPRETATION

A pyramid

- restate main findings (key results) and move quickly to broad conclusion
- place results in perspective (other studies) (avoid excess repetition)
- DESCRIBE LIMITATIONS
- restrict interpretation to these results
- implications for practice or research
- don't conclude "more research needed"

Polish

- revise, revise, and revise for:
accuracy, brevity, clarity, grace
- accuracy: spelling, figures differ in tables and text; too many decimals
- brevity: empty phrases and words; excessive weak verbs and connectives
- clarity: first person; basic grammar
- grace: choice of words; vary sentences

Style Pointers

- vary sentence and paragraph lengths
- make transitions between paragraphs
- put sentences in logical sequence
- choose the right word
- avoid weak verbs and connectives
- prune empty phrases and words

Elements of style

- It behooves the writer to avoid archaic expressions
- do not use hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly
- avoid clichés like the plague
- mixed metaphors are a pain in the neck and ought to be thrown out the window
- consult the dictionary frequently to avoid misspellings

Parsimony

- make it “lean and mean” -- make every word justify its existence
- check word limit; do word count
- even if o.k., shorter is (almost) always better
- cut all extra words, phrases, paragraphs
- prune, prune, prune

Punctuation

- enhances meaning
- gives style; saves space
- avoid! consider?
- learn: comma, semi-colon, dash, colon
- read with your ears

Revision and Rejection

- Everyone gets rejected – do not take it or specific reviewer comments personally
- Revise promptly as requested
- Show clearly in a covering letter how you have addressed the reviewers comments
- Resubmit
- Push and explain
- Choose another journal

Been Previously Rejected by Another Journal?

- DO send the reviewers' comments, + a letter showing how you've addressed changes to the new journal editor
- Redraft in the style and meeting the needs of the new journal

Author Crimes

- Plagiarism
- Not reading cited papers
- Duplicate publication (& not telling)
- Salami slicing (& not telling)
- Media coverage prior to publication
- Web publication?

Do not forget impact

- Making a difference
- RQF