

Planning the Type of Article

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On January 5, 1665, the first scientific journal, "The Journal Des Scavans," published its first issue. The mandate offered by the editor was that this Journal was a "means of satisfying curiosity and becoming learned with little effort for those either too indolent or too occupied to read whole books."

There are now over 20,000 different biomedical journals published today. The journal article is still the "gold standard," and professionals are always referring to these original sources.

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I am sure that there have been many times in your career that you observed a unique case or used a treatment plan which you believed would be interesting to others in your field. The fear of actually sitting down to collect your thoughts, organize them, and finally put the information down on paper is not easy. With a few guidelines and some encouragement, the task is really not difficult....and can even be fun. The feeling of accomplishment after the manuscript is sent to the editor is terrific (note I am not using carefully chosen medicaleaze type jargon, but writing as I would speak). A returned acceptance weeks later is even more gratifying.

SOYOUWANTTOWRITE:WHATNEXT????????????????????

1) PLANNING:

1. State an Idea
2. Develop the idea by researching the subject and obtaining information
3. State the thesis or hypothesis.
4. Decide on the type of article which will accurately express your thoughts:
 - Editorial
 - Letter to the Editor
 - Original Article
 - Case Report
 - State of the Art Review
5. Choose the Journal which publishes information on your topic.

6. Read and review the "instructions for the author's" section.

2) ORGANIZATION

- a) Format
- b) Order of presentation
 1. Abstract

2. Introduction
3. Material and methods
4. Results
5. Discussion
6. Conclusions
7. Bibliography

- *Each journal has its own specific order of presentation, and it is important to review this order before continuing with the organization of material.*

c) Illustrations

d) First draft

e) Questions to ask after first draft:

1. Is the topic stated clearly?
2. Are the methods simple and precise?
3. Is there a structure to the article?
4. Is the material divided and balanced well? (a two-page material and methods section followed by ten lines of results is not balanced)
5. Is the writing clear without:
 - a) grammatical mistakes
 - b) too much passive voice
 - c) jargon
 - d) excessive abbreviations
 - e) confusing pronouns
 - f) circumlocution (see definition under #6)
 - g) tautology (see definition under #7)
 - h) difficult words
6. Are the statistics accurate? It may be prudent to incorporate a statistician to review the data as the field of statistics has expanded greatly.
7. Is the bibliography current?

f) Second draft

g) Final review

h) Submit article

Now that I have outlined the steps involved in planning, organizing, and writing an article, let us deal with specifics.

3) THE TYPE OF ARTICLE TO WRITE

a) Letter to the Editor:

This column is usually the best read section of general medical journals. The letter should encourage peer review and demonstrates that the reader has read and thought about the material.

The letter to the editor should:

1. Be short (less than 500 words)
2. Use clear style
3. Focus on one point
4. Use correct references

The letter should not:

1. Become a mini-article
2. Be damning or overzealous

The editor:

1. Should correct spelling mistakes or edit material in bad taste
2. Should publish the material as soon as possible
3. Should send the letter to the author of record if his/her work is criticized. The letter and the reply should appear in the same issue.

b) Editorial

The editorials are "point of view" statements. The material can be about a new research advance, a political statement on a "position point," or a review of an existing problem. The editorial should be signed, although sometimes anonymous editorials have been published. Editorial comment on issues appearing in the journal itself is particularly helpful. Editorials are hard to write because they must be brief, state a point of view quickly and concisely, often without the possibility of using data or statistics. The editorial should not be taken lightly for its role is that of "ultimate peer review."

c) Case Report

Often placed in the least distinguished section of the journal, the case report is valuable and can be used to review the literature in the discussion section. The knowledge of the disease process is increased. The author should report the uncommon features of the case, the new associations between this case and others, and the importance of this new information. The case report echoes the bedside case presentation and is a valuable teaching tool.

d) State of the Art – Review Article

This type of article is written to organize the literature and present the information so that the practitioner can use it. If done correctly, the review article requires careful planning and extensive research. If too long, the author will lose the audience. If too short or not inclusive, the audience will look elsewhere for the information.

e) Original Article: Refer to the guidelines under "reading the biomedical literature."

Once the format is chosen and the data presented, the results and statistical evaluation should be stated simply. There is a list provided by the journal concerning number, type, and clarity of illustration.

tions. The references to figures, tables, and graphs should simplify the work rather than falsely embellish the material.

The writing should be clear without:

- 1) Grammatical mistakes: spelling, punctuation, proper use of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives should be of primary importance. Have the material read by another individual who is knowledgeable in this field.
- 2) Overusing the passive voice:
 - Passive: This theory is supported by observations on the gravid rhinoceros.
 - Active: Observations on the gravid rhinoceros support this theory.
- 3) Jargon:
 - Don't say: After sequential interfacing, the therapeutic modality chosen was a surgical intervention.
 - Do say: After several meetings, surgery was the therapy chosen.
- 4) Excessive Abbreviations:

This LBW infant spent four weeks in the NICU and needed IMV, ECMO, and CPAP in addition to the closure of his PDA. He developed A&B and a PG before discharge.

ENOUGH SAID!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- 5) Confusing pronouns:

Example: Indomethacin is used to close a patent ductus arteriosus. What *is* important? The "is" refers to the indomethacin, not the dutus arteriosus.
- 6) Circumlocution:

This is a roundabout way of saying something which should be said concisely, simply, and directly.

Don't say: On an experimental basis, a large number of patients at this point in time need a great deal of support.

Do say: By experiment, more patients now need support.
- 7) Tautology: saying the same things in different words.

Example: Vaguely Obscure

Recline Back

Still Continue
- 8) Overweight words:

Don't say: The requirements of the system forced modifications, which called for the assistance of the Director before a change was effectuated.

Do say: The need of the system forced changes, and help from the Director was necessary before an effect occurred.

The above examples demonstrate the need to write simply and use a heavy hand and pen to delete words and phrases if they

are cumbersome and not clear!!!!!!!!!!

1. Are the statistics accurate?

If the statistics are not presented in an easy, clear manner, the reader will give up and skip the section entirely. The editor and referee reviewing the paper will do the same.

Use few words and concrete examples. Make sure the correct test is used.

2. Is the bibliography current?

Unless a review or historical manuscript is used, the current literature should be used.

Choose an initial reference that was the first article written in this particular field if necessary, but current up to date references are a must. Conform to the style of the journal!!!

3. Second Draft:

The second draft should focus on structure and balance. One section should not be too large or small compared to another. The abstract must state the purpose of the article, indicate the methods used, and summarize the results and conclusions. The abstract should be 200 words or less, convey the scope of the paper, and provide information. The abstract must stand on its own, and it should enable the reader to decide whether or not to proceed to a formal reading of the paper.

The date, references, style, and flow of the writing should be checked.

4. Final Draft:

After the second draft, put the paper on the shelf for a few days to recharge your batteries. Reread the material from a fresh perspective and try to cut and shorten words and phrases which are unnecessary. Ask another colleague to read the material from several viewpoints. First, are the questions answered clearly? Second, is the reading simple? Third, is the style simple?

If all of the above is true...You are ready to submit the manuscript

Disclosure: Dr. Martin indicates no relevant disclosure.

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