

How to submit to a scientific journal and get published

Javeria Junaid

Department of Surgery, Ziauddin University Hospital, North Nazimabad, Karachi.

Email: javeria.n.j@gmail.com

Harry Shaw quotes in *Errors in English and Ways to Correct Them*, "There is no such thing as good writing. There is only good rewriting."¹ We must accept the fact that scholarly articles are not written but rewritten. As authors confirm, it would not be a stretch of the imagination to add a few "again and again" after it. Finally, after all the hard work of thinking, conducting and drafting the study manuscript the authors face the arduous task of moulding their hard work according to the regulations of the desired journal. It is the last but critical step and needs to be taken carefully. Failing to do so means loads of author-journal correspondence, reviewers and editorial comments and a possibility of rejection for publication.

Almost all national and international journals have their own set of guidelines that they expect to be followed and authors are encouraged to consult them according to their specific research designs. These can be found under headlines like "Instructions to Authors"²⁻⁴ "Author Centre"⁵ or "Guide

to Authors."⁶ Reporting guidelines have been developed for a number of study designs that some journals may ask authors to follow, and can be used to safely write initial drafts that will not require too much alteration whilst submission. The hallmark of such reporting guidelines is the EQUATOR Network.⁷ JPMA is the first Pakistani journal to officially adapt these guidelines for assisting the authors and readers.

Journals have policies for authorship which must be respected especially when the problems of "gift authorship" are rampant. Most policies are in accordance with the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).⁸ At the time of submission almost all journals require the author(s) to provide an undertaking/disclosure form stating that if chosen to be published the author's work becomes the intellectual property of the journal. Authors must realize that duplicate submission/publication is not only unethical but can also result in serious consequences such as black listing or debarment.

Manuscript submission also requires a cover letter. It gives the authors a chance to write a short note for the editor emphasizing the importance of their work and the need for it to be printed in an esteemed journal.

Another important component is the title page. It is a separate single page which gives specific information about the authors and their affiliations. Often online submitting systems require the author to submit another copy of their article without this page. This helps in blinding the reviewer and decrease bias decisions. Adequate attention must be paid to the journal's preference for the title, abstract, tables, word count and figures. An author must mention any conflict of interest or source of funding like grants or affiliations.

All authors are encouraged to use easy yet professional language and adhere to international standards of written language. Different journals prefer different languages. JPMA prefers British English. Journals will tell you their preferred language and abbreviation status. When using abbreviations write the full form with the abbreviation in brackets once, and then proceed to use it as and when required. There should not be any use of abbreviations in the abstract.

Double-spacing the manuscript and generous margins are preferred as they make it possible for editors and reviewers to edit the text line by line and add comments and

queries directly on the paper copy.⁹ Justified text in Time New Roman format with 12 font size is a standard accepted by most journals.

By simply giving some time to read and write according to the 'Instructions to Authors' of the journal you are submitting your work, one can improve on the likelihood to get accepted. A clear, well-written article not only makes the tasks of journal editors easier but it also gives the author a fair chance of publication.

References

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