

HOW TO WRITE A FLAWLESS MANUSCRIPT

Book 1: A series of free educational eBooks from Edorium Journals

In this eBook:

- How to overcome writer's block
- Importance of five drafts
- Manuscript writing strategies
- IMRAD structure of a manuscript
- Standards of reporting
- How to craft a compelling title
- How to write different sections
- How to assign authorship credits
- Reference writing and Vancouver style
- How to select a journal for submission
- How to reply to peer reviewer's comments
- Most common errors in preparing a manuscript
- Top reasons for rejection of a manuscript

Book Title: How to write a flawless manuscript

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INTRODUCTION

Writing a flawless scientific manuscript takes time, hard work, dedication, attention to detail and a lot of patience. Having a written plan before starting to write and doing it in a systematic way can make manuscript writing a very intellectually satisfying and enjoyable task.

This book will give you many useful pointers for writing a good manuscript. We are sure that the information and guidelines present in this book will help you in writing a flawless manuscript and enhance the chances of its publication.

We hope you will enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Let's begin by a quote:

Write to educate not to impress

STEP I BASIC CONCEPTS

First, some important but often neglected facts.

Important

Remember that journals give “Instructions for Authors” **always**.

Very important

Read the guidelines given in “Instructions for Authors” **thoroughly**.

Most important

Follow the instructions given in “Instructions for Authors” **meticulously**.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the International Journal of Case Reports and Images (IJCRI). The header includes the journal title and logo, along with navigation links: Current Issue, Archive, Submit Manuscript, FAQ, and Contact Us. A search bar is located in the top right. The main content area features a description of the journal and a cover image for the April 2014 issue. On the right side, there is a sidebar with a search bar and two sections: 'Submit Manuscript' and 'For Authors'. The 'For Authors' section contains a list of links: Instructions for Authors, Authorship Credits, Download Templates, Author Checklist, Copyright Policy, Copyright Forms, and Notes for Authors. A green arrow points to the 'Instructions for Authors' link.

Meticulously following the instructions given by a journal is very important to ensure that the manuscript is technically sound and conforms to the requirements of the journal. It makes the task of editors and reviewers easy and prevents avoidable wastage of time for everyone.

WRITER'S BLOCK

Overwhelmed? Don't know where to start writing? Does writing a manuscript seem a terrifying task?

Avoid the writer's block by following the points below.

- Write when the energy is high.
- Avoid writing when you are mentally or physically exhausted.
- Set aside certain time every day or every week to focus only on writing.
- Write at a quiet place free of all distractions – a library would be a good place to write.
- Gather all data, books, articles, stationary and other materials before starting.
- Write a broad outline on a paper before starting to write. You can list sections of the manuscript and write 3–4 points for each section.
- **Quickly try to get something — one line, one paragraph, few points — on paper or computer monitor.**
- Best sections to start writing are “Methods” and “Results” sections.
- Do not try for perfection in the first draft.

Write manuscript in parts. Don't attempt to write the whole manuscript at one time. Writing first draft of a research article can take anywhere from few days to few weeks depending on your other commitments.

PLAN FOR WRITING A MANUSCRIPT

1. PLAN 1

Write a manuscript with generic sections – Chose a target journal – Read instructions for authors – Format the layout and presentation of the manuscript according to the instructions – Submit manuscript for publication to the target journal

2. PLAN 2

Chose a target journal – Read instructions for authors – Write the manuscript according to the format of layout and presentation given in the instructions – Submit manuscript for publication to the target journal

Advantage of writing a manuscript with generic sections is that less time is required to change the format of the manuscript when it is submitted to a journal. This is especially true for the citations in the text and references. If a manuscript is formatted specifically for a journal, it may take a lot of time to change the format to conform to any other journal.

FIVE DRAFTS OF A MANUSCRIPT

Write your manuscript following the 'Five Draft' process to achieve perfection.

First draft: A collection of facts and thoughts that may be random, disordered, non-sequential; sentences may be incomplete, grammar may be incorrect

Second draft: Facts and thoughts are arranged in a coherent, logical pattern and checked for accuracy

Third Draft: Sentences and paragraphs are refined and polished, facts are re-checked for accuracy

Fourth draft: Cover letter and title page are added and whole manuscript is further refined and polished

Fifth draft: The whole manuscript is again polished and finalized

First draft and second drafts are the most important drafts in the manuscript writing process.

First draft

- **Get something on paper as quickly as possible – seeing the written words will give you confidence that you can actually complete this (overwhelming) task.**
- Just concentrate on capturing main points and ideas.
- Do not edit as you write.
- Do not go back and rewrite.
- Do not worry about words, spellings or punctuation.
- Write - write - write—at the speed of light.

Second draft

- Arrange the facts and thoughts in coherent logical manner.
- Check that method is present for every fact presented in the results.
- Check the facts for accuracy.
- Check calculations, numbers, totals and percentages.
- Check for citation of tables, figures and references in the text.
- Check table and figure legends for correctness and brevity.
- Check for formatting of references.
- Check for annotations in tables and figures.
- Check for spelling, typographical and grammatical errors.

IMRAD STRUCTURE OF A MANUSCRIPT (Research manuscript)

The research manuscripts, especially for observational and experimental studies are written in a format known as IMRAD format. The IMRAD is an acronym for:

I - Introduction
M - Methods
R - Results
A - and
D –Discussion

This format is given in the “Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals”. These Uniform Requirements are released by International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).

It is important to remember that you can write the above sections of a manuscript in any order you like, however, the final version of the manuscript submitted for publication to a journal must have the sections in the order given above.

STANDARDS OF REPORTING

The standards of reporting are guidelines given for reporting different study designs which help in improving the reporting of a study. Most of these guidelines consist of a checklist pertaining to contents of Title, Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion. The checklist needs to be submitted at the time of submitting the manuscript. The guidelines for some common type of study designs are given below. For a comprehensive list of guidelines please see the website of Edorium Journals.

Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT)

An evidence-based, minimum set of recommendations for reporting randomized controlled trials. It offers a standard way for authors to prepare reports of trial findings, facilitating their complete and transparent reporting, and aiding their critical appraisal and interpretation.

Meta-analyses of observational studies in epidemiology (MOOSE)

The checklist contains specifications for reporting of meta-analyses of observational studies in epidemiology, including background, search strategy, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA)

The aim is to help authors report a wide array of systematic reviews to assess the benefits and harms of a health care intervention.

QUality of Reporting of Meta-analyses (QUOROM)

Checklist to present the abstract, introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections of a report of a meta-analysis.

STrengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology (STROBE)

An international, collaborative initiative of scholars involved in the conduct and dissemination of observational studies, with the common aim of Strengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology.

For a comprehensive list of guidelines please see the website of Edorium Journals

MANUSCRIPT WRITING STRATEGIES

There are many different strategies for writing a manuscript. The manuscript writing strategy mean the sequence of writing different sections of a manuscript. Some scholars like to start by first writing the Methods section, some like to start by first writing the abstract. Some of the common manuscript writing strategies are given below. Try experimenting with them and see what works best for you. In our experience the first strategy works the best.

1. Methods – Tables/Graphs/Figures – Results – Discussion – Conclusion – Introduction – Abstract – Title page – Review by colleagues – Revision
2. Tables/Graphs/Figures – Discuss results with colleagues – Results – Methods – Introduction – Review by colleagues – Discussion – Abstract – Revision
3. Tables/Graphs/Figures – Results – Methods – Introduction – Discussion – Conclusion – Abstract – Title page – Review by colleagues – Revision

OUTLINE OF MANUSCRIPTS

Given below are the different sections/headings of various type of manuscripts.

Review Article

- Title page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Other headings as required by the topic
- Summary
- Abbreviations
- Acknowledgements
- References

- Legends
- Tables
- Graphs
- Figures

Original Article/Short Report/Rapid Communication

- Title page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Abbreviations
- Acknowledgements
- References
- Legends
- Tables
- Graphs
- Figures

Case Series/Case Report

- Title page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Case Series/Case Report
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Abbreviations
- Acknowledgements
- References
- Legends
- Tables
- Graphs
- Figures

Without a systemic approach it is easy to get frustrated while writing a manuscript. Frustration will lead to discouragement which will lead to a lot of unpublished manuscripts which will lead to disillusionment with the whole process of academic discovery and reporting. All this happens because the author spend months performing a study but does not spend half an hour planning and outlining the manuscript. We have seen this happen to many authors. Don't let yourself be one of them.

It is just a matter of half an hour.

GENERAL POINTS FOR WRITING A MANUSCRIPT

- Write the manuscript as soon as possible after completing the study. In fact the Methods and Results section can be written even before the study is complete. Do not leave writing to the last minute.
- **Before beginning to work on a manuscript, write a general outline of headings and subheadings on a sheet of paper.**
- If manuscript templates are provided by the journal, use them to write the manuscript.
- Type the manuscript on a computer or a laptop. Do not write it by hand. If you write by hand, by the fourth page or at the most by first revision you will be wondering why you did not follow this advice.
- **Save multiple copies of the manuscript drafts on different devices like computer/laptop, flash drive, CD ROM's etc.**
- When saving multiple copies of the manuscript drafts, add the date (year month day (YYYYMMDD) format) to the file name of the manuscript file to keep track of the latest copy of the manuscript. In the file name keep the year first then month then day. This is important if you want to archive all versions of a manuscript in the same folder on one device. (E.g. of consecutive file names: Paper20140405, Paper20140423, Paper20140507 or Hepatitis20140405, Hepatitis20140423, Hepatitis20140507 etc.)
- Before beginning to type the manuscript in any word processor, adjust the settings of the page.
- Generally the settings of the word processor are: double spaced text, one inch margin all around and a 12 point font such as Times New Roman, Arial or Courier.
- Add to header of page: Surname of first author followed by et al.
- Add to footer of page: Page numbers. Instead of adding page number in simple format like 1, 2, 3, 4... or Page1, Page2, Page3... it is a good idea to add page numbers as "Page 1 of 10; Page 2 of 10" ... or 1/10, 2/10, 3/10 etc. These options are available in the word processor.
- Begin each section (Introduction, Methods, Results etc.) on a new page.

- Use TAB at the start of each paragraph to indent the first line to the right as compared to all other lines of the paragraph.
- **The topic sentence (first sentence) of each paragraph is the MOST important sentence of the paragraph. It should explain the primary focus of the paragraph.**
- Discuss only one fact, one thought or one theme in one paragraph.
- KISS is amazing – Keep It Simple Stupid (KISS) – Keep the writing simple, use short sentences, use simple language and focus on one fact at one time.
- Do not use too many parentheses in one sentence.
- Be consistent in language throughout the manuscript (US or UK spellings).
- Use short, direct sentences with minimum words but do not compromise on the meaning. **“The patient mentioned....”** is much easier to read than **“It was mentioned by the patient...”** and uses 50% less words.
- Check for spelling, grammatical and typographical errors.
- Avoid non-standard abbreviations.
- **Describe all abbreviations on first mention in the text.**
- If many abbreviations are used, list them under a separate heading titled “Abbreviations”. This section is placed after Conclusion and before Acknowledgements.
- Use precise language. Avoid terms like “some more”, “little more”, “less high”.
- Have the manuscript checked by a person fluent in the language of the manuscript.
- Always do a spell check after completing each draft of the manuscript.
- Ask colleagues for feedback. Different views and perspectives from your colleagues will tremendously help in improving your paper.
- **Do not plagiarize** anything including text, tables and pictures. Journals routinely check manuscripts for plagiarism.
- **Plagiarism is one of the safest and surest ways to get your manuscript rejected even before a peer review.**
- **Write – discuss – revise – discuss – revise – discuss – revise. Do this again and again and you will get it right.**

Be your harshest critic, but not for a moment doubt your abilities to excel.

STEP II

WRITING THE MANUSCRIPT

Now we will concentrate on writing different sections of a manuscript following the sequence as given under first point of “**Manuscript writing strategies**”. If you want to follow any of the other strategies, the guidelines remain the same; just the order of writing sections will change.

THREE PARTS FOR REVERANCE

TITLE
ABSTRACT
INTRODUCTION

The above three parts of a manuscript decide if someone reads, appreciates and cites your study or it is ignored and confined to the intellectual wastebasket. Open access journals provide free access to full text of the paper on the journal websites, but for non-open access journals, these might be the only parts of a paper freely accessible to a reader.

Hold these parts in reverence and become a master at crafting them.

TABLES, GRAPHS AND FIGURES

IMPORTANT

Give as many tables, graphs and figures as are required to explain the findings of the study. Do not include too many tables, graphs and figures. Too many of them can obscure the results and make interpretation of results difficult for the readers. How much is “too many” depends on your study and amount of data you want to present. In our opinion 3-5 tables, 3-5 graphs and 5-10 figures would be an appropriate range for a research article. Do remember however, that this may vary widely for different study.

- Tables, graphs and figures must be:
 - Easy to read
 - Self-explanatory
- **Give descriptive legends to make the tables, graphs and figures self-explanatory.**
- Do not include too much data in tables. It will make them difficult to understand and boring to read.

- Define all abbreviations and annotation in the footnote of the tables.
- Always display trends (e.g. over time, between groups) as graphs.
- Group similar figures together for easy understanding.
- Clearly annotate the graphs and figures using different symbols. Do not use * then ** then *** then **** etc. to annotate different values. Use separate symbols like *, \$, #, ¥ and £ etc.
- Use “scale” with photographs and photomicrographs.
- Use appropriate formats (GIF, TIF, JPEG etc.) and resolution of figures (generally 300dpi for print and 300ppi for electronic). This information is usually provided in the “Instructions for Authors”.

RESULTS

You are the expert in the subject of your study, the readers are not. Do not assume that results are self-evident to the readers. Explain the results as much as possible.

FIRST: Use guidelines given in standards of reporting for different types of studies to plan the presentation of the results.

SECOND: Prepare tables, graphs and figures.

THIRD: Write “Results” section as a sightseeing tour describing the data in the tables, graphs and figures.

IMPORTANT

- **Present results in a logical manner. Chronological presentation of results may not always be the best way of understanding them.**
- **Every result described in the “Results” section must have a method in the “Methods” sections.**
- Do not compare the results with previously published studies.

VERY IMPORTANT

Do not hide results. It is especially important for results which are not in agreement with previously published studies. This will not only irritate the readers but also create doubt about your motives and authenticity of your study. If your results are in conflict with previously published literature, do not hide them. This is your chance to shine – explain why your results are different and convince the readers that your work is “beyond extraordinary”.

TO DO

- Present the results in the text aided by tables, graphs and figures in such a way that they can be understood with minimal effort.
- Describe the important data given in the tables, graphs and figures in the “Results” section.
- Take care NOT to repeat all the data from the tables, graphs and figures in the text of the “Results” section.
- **One way to present the results is to give them in the same order as the protocol given in the “Methods” section.**
- Start by describing the study population, number of subjects, subject dropouts and demographic data.
- Describe the most important results first followed by a description of the less important results.
- Describe the outcome of primary variable followed by outcome of secondary variables.
- Give only major and representative results which support your hypothesis. Do not give value of each and every variable measured in the study.
- Include losses to observations.
- Report treatment complications.
- Use subheadings to group similar results together and to separate results of different parameters.
- When reporting observations, first give numeric value followed by percentage in parentheses.
- Where possible quantify observations and give mean with standard deviation or standard error of mean.
- Tables, graphs and figures MUST be self-explanatory.
- Describe comparisons as significant or not significant. Do not use words like greatly, majorly, extremely before the terms “significant” and “not significant”.
- In the tables include a separate column of p values.
- Give actual p values and stick to two or three decimal places.
- If you are not using actual p values, consistently use the same value, e.g. $p < 0.05$.
- Do not use a mix of different p values, e.g. $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$ in the same manuscript.

DO NOT

Do not compare your results with results of previously published studies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials and Methods is the most critical part of a manuscript.

This is the second most read/studied/discussed/analyzed part of a manuscript. The first is “Results”.

FOR YOU: In this section YOU will describe exactly what you did in the study.

FOR OTHERS: Describe the study in sufficient detail so that OTHER knowledgeable researcher can replicate the study BUT do not describe more than that.

First and foremost, describe the type of study: descriptive (case series, case report), retrospective or analytical (randomized controlled trials, case-control study, cohort study, cross sectional study etc.)

If working with human subjects, mention in the first paragraph that:

- i) Approval was taken from appropriate review board/committee
- ii) Written, informed consent was taken from the subjects
- iii) Procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards given in the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975, as revised in 2000.
- iv) Be careful to hide patient identifying data (name, initials, hospital registration number) in the text as well as in the figures. Mask the patient’s face in clinical photographs if it is not essential for the study.
- v) If the patient’s face or any identifying data is shown, be sure to obtain a written, informed consent.

If working with animal subjects, mention clearly that:

- i) Approval was taken from appropriate review board/committee.
- ii) Care of animals was in accordance with institution’s or national research council’s guidelines for, or any national law on the care and use of laboratory animals.

If you used previously published methodology given by others:

- i) Write the methodology in your own words and give appropriate references.
- ii) Quote the methodology verbatim, put the verbatim text in quotation marks (“...”) and give appropriate references
- iii) Write “The abcxyz procedure was performed as described by/in Milton et. al.” and give appropriate references. (Unless absolutely necessary describe the methodology and avoid this approach).

If you have modified the methodology given by another author or methodology given by you in your previous study, give details of the modifications and reasons why the modifications were done for the current study.

TO DO

- Give methods in chronological order.
- Describe first what you did first and describe last what you did last.
- Describe the type of study.
- Describe the study population in detail.
- Define groups of study population as descriptively as possible (e.g. phenytoin group and valproate group; hepatitis group and pancreatitis group; and not as group A and group B).
- Describe the inclusion and exclusion criteria in detail.
- Describe randomization process, if applicable to the study.
- Describe in chronological order, how the study was conducted in each group of subjects.
- Give in detail the procedures (clinical/experimental) followed for performing the study.
- Describe all parameters and measurements, the results of which will be reported in the Results section.
- If required, divide Methods section into subsections and use headings and subheadings.
- Give details of drugs, chemicals and reagents (lot no, manufacturer, address/country); and instruments (model no, manufacturer, address/country).
- Give generic names of drugs, chemicals and reagents unless it is absolutely necessary to give trade/brand names.
- Give generic names of drugs with dosages and route of administration.
- Describe any precautions or special conditions for subjects, procedures and tests.
- Describe statistical methods.
- Describe details of randomization (if applicable).
- Describe in detail how data analysis was done.
- Describe software used for statistical analysis.
- Give references for statistical methods (if required).

DO NOT

- Do not give every infinitesimally small detail. Give just enough details so that other researchers can reproduce the experiments and build upon the research you are reporting.

- Do not omit essential information like details of data collection, laboratory procedure, reagents and instruments.
- Do not omit essential information because you feel that others will duplicate your results. Your research is your own before and after it is published. Only you know the minute nitty-gritty details which combined together to give you the results you achieved. If someone wants to duplicate your results they will find ways to do it even if you omit any essential information. However, omitting information will be very unfair for people who are genuinely interested in your research.

DISCUSSION

DO NOT make it so lengthy that:

Readers find it boring, then

Readers loose track, then

Readers are exasperated, then

Readers go to sleep – midway.

REMEMBER

You did a great job of doing the study. Now do an even greater job of selling your study to the your readers. “Selling” – that is what discussion is all about. To convince the readers that what you did is exceptional, ground-breaking, once-in-a-millennium kind of work. If you do this, readers will reward you by appreciating your paper and recognize your hard work by citing your work in their papers. Do you really want them to sleep midway while reading your article?

In the discussion, convince the reader that your study is logical, methods are sound, result are groundbreaking and speculations are valid.

Make it very clear for every result you discuss, whether you are:

- i) interpreting the results and predicting future course of action, or
- ii) only speculating.

We will modify the quote we gave in initial pages of this book:

Write to educate not to impress

to read:

**Write to educate
Not to impress
Not to make them sleep**

TO DO

- Keep the discussion:
 - Crisp
 - Succinct
 - To the point
- Before writing, decide in advance which results you want to discuss and which to omit.
- **You do not have to discuss every miniscule finding of your study from every possible angle while comparing it to every study in existence.**
- **Write separate paragraphs to put your results in perspective—one paragraph for one major finding.**
- Be as specific as possible.
- To compare your results with previous studies, describe your results in percentages not numbers.
- Give conflicting results and reasons why there is a conflict.
- Point out the limitations of other studies but do not criticize them.
- You can speculate about possible reasons and interpretations of your results but keep them based on facts, keep them logical, keep them realistic and keep the imagination in check.

Speculate but do not exaggerate

DO NOT

- **Do not discuss anything in the discussion that you have not described in the methods and that you have not presented in the results.**
- Do not repeat results in this section. Results belong to the Results section.
- Do not ignore results of previous studies which are different from yours. Include them and explain why this is so.

- Do not use statements like “results were – interesting, notable, surprising, relevant”; unless you explain why the results were interesting, notable, surprising or relevant; and back it up by your data.
- Do not inflate the importance of your findings.
- Do not review literature extensively.
- Do not go on a tangent when discussing a point.

ABSOLUTE DO NOT

- Do not give wild speculations
- Do not give wild hypothesis
- Do not give overblown statements

In the FIRST paragraph give the:

- Hypothesis/aims
- **Brief description of your major findings**
- Explain the rationale of your methods, justify and defend your protocol, numbers, grouping, randomization, drugs, dosages, techniques and methods of analysis.

In each SUCCESSIONAL paragraph:

- Describe one major result.
- Describe significance of this result.
- Put this result in perspective.
 - Describe what others observed in the past
 - Describe if your study confirmed or refuted previous observations
- Describe reasons why your result were similar or different compared to previous studies.
- After discussing the major findings, discuss minor findings in somewhat less detail.

THIRD TO LAST PARAGRAPH

Discuss the impact of your work on research and clinical practice.

SECOND TO LAST PARAGRAPH

No study is perfect. It may appear that your study was performed perfectly and everything was accounted for but perfection is something we always strive for but perhaps never achieve. In this paragraph describe limitations of your study in study design, patient population, patient selection, methodology, interpretation etc.

LAST PARAGRAPH

(or a separate heading of “Conclusion”)

Give a conclusion describing:

- What you showed
- What does it imply for the topic/field of research
- Future directions to build upon your research

TO DO

- Keep the conclusion realistic.
- Conclude only in context of your results.
- Keep the conclusion less than 4-5 sentences.
- Do not cite references in the conclusion.

DO NOT (repeated again)

- Do not give wild speculations.
- Do not give wild hypothesis.
- Do not give overblown statements.

INTRODUCTION

In the “Introduction” section give a bird’s eye view of the topic. Keep it short and to the point. Structure the introduction in three paragraphs:

FIRST PARAGRAPH

- What is known about the topic
- What is current/latest knowledge

SECOND PARAGRAPH

- What are the problems/lacuna/unanswered questions
- What are the limitations of the existing solutions

THIRD PARAGRAPH

- What questions are you trying to answer
- What problems are you trying to solve
- In the last few lines clearly state:

- The primary hypothesis (primary aim)
- The secondary hypothesis (secondary aim)

TO DO

- Be brief and to the point.
- Not more than three paragraphs.
- About 500-800 words.
- Give only brief literature review.
- Give only pertinent references.

DO NOT

- Do not give methods of the study.
- Do not give results of the study.
- Do not discuss results of the study.
- Do not give conclusion of the study.

REFERENCES

The “References” section is the most error prone part of a manuscript.

It is very annoying, irritating and exasperating part of the manuscript for editors, reviewers and editorial staff.

References are a reflection of the attitude
Sloppy references – sloppy manuscript – sloppy study – sloppy attitude

IMPORTANT

Cite all the references in the text, at appropriate places.

Cite an article only if you have read and referred to the article. Reading just the title or the abstract does not count.

TO DO

- Check references for accuracy. Accuracy of the references is author’s responsibility.

- Do not cite any article which has been retracted. How can you know this? As said above, check references for accuracy. If an article has been retracted it will be mentioned in the article webpage on the journal website.
- Format the references perfectly as given in “Instruction for Authors” of the journal.
- Learn to use Endnote or WinWord to format and re-arrange references with ease.
- It is advisable to avoid citing papers which are more than 10 years old unless they are the pioneering papers in the field of study.
- Manuscripts accepted but not yet published are designated as “in press” or “forthcoming”, e.g. Winter H, Field M, McDaid J, Vishwanath D, Inston N. Primary hyperparathyroidism in a patient with renal cell carcinoma. *Edorium J Med.* (forthcoming).
- Avoid citing data from submitted but not yet accepted manuscripts. If it is absolutely necessary to do so, manuscripts submitted but not yet accepted for publication are designated as “unpublished observations”, e.g. Winter H, Field M, McDaid J, Vishwanath D, Inston N. Primary hyperparathyroidism in a patient with renal cell carcinoma. *Edorium J Med.* (unpublished observations).

DO NOT

- Do not include too many references.
- Do not cite data from manuscripts not yet submitted for publication.
- Do not cite too many articles from:
 - Same author
 - Same journal
 - Same publisher
 - Same region

Not more than 10-15% of the references in a manuscript should be from the same journal. Do not self-cite too many of your own previous publications.

To know the reference style specific for any journal, refer to the instructions for authors given by the journal.

Some journals require the references to be listed in consecutive order. Others require references to be listed alphabetically by surname of the first author.

The citation of the references in the text differs between journals. Some may require citations in the text by Arabic numerals in parenthesis e.g. (1, 2) or (1-5, 6, 7-9) or (1-5, 6 8, 9-11), while others require citations by surname of the first author followed by year of publication of the article e. g. (Jones et al., 2014) or (Clark et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2014).

Many journals now require references to be formatted in the Vancouver style. It is important to familiarize yourself with Vancouver style.

The general format of a reference in the Vancouver style is:

Author Surname followed by Initials. Article title. Abbreviated journal name. Year Month (if available) Day (if available);volume(number):inclusive page numbers.

Example:

With only year of publication:

Winter H, Field M, McDaid J, Vishwanath D, Inston N. Primary hyperparathyroidism in a patient with renal cell carcinoma. *Edorium J Med.* 2014;3(4):19–28.

With year and month of publication:

Winter H, Field M, McDaid J, Vishwanath D, Inston N. Primary hyperparathyroidism in a patient with renal cell carcinoma. *Edorium J Med.* 2014 May;3(4):19–28.

With year, month and day of publication:

Winter H, Field M, McDaid J, Vishwanath D, Inston N. Primary hyperparathyroidism in a patient with renal cell carcinoma. *Edorium J Med.* 2014 May 08;3(4):19–28.

ABSTRACT

Abstract must be interesting enough to make them (readers) buy your product (read your article). Use the abstract to excite the readers, start the juices flowing and leave them hungry for more.

Abstract is the advertisement of your article.

- Write the abstract when the manuscript is completely ready from “Introduction” to “References”.
- Abstracts are of two types:
 - Structured abstracts
 - Unstructured abstracts.

- Structured abstract has subheading:
 - Research article abstract – Aims, Methods, Results, Conclusions
 - Case report abstract – Introduction, Case Report, Conclusion
- Unstructured abstract does not have subheadings although the presentation of data is in the same order.

TO DO

- **To choose the format of the abstract (structured or unstructured) see the “Instruction for Authors” or see previously published manuscripts in the target journal.**
- Abstract must be interesting to read, easy to understand, accurate and specific.
- In the abstract give a brief background, state the purpose of the study, briefly describe the methods, and give the main results followed by the principle conclusions.
- Use present tense to report what is known in the field of study.
- Use past tense to report what you showed and did in the study.
- If you have not yet decided about the target journal, it is a good idea to write a structured abstract. It will be easy to convert it into an unstructured abstract, which can be done by removing the headings and combining everything into one paragraph.
- Stick to the word limit given for the abstract. An abstract of 250 words does not mean an abstract of 500 words and it also does not mean an abstract of 50 words. A range of $\pm 5\%$ of the word count is acceptable.
- Where relevant, present results with numeric values and p values.
- If possible do not use abbreviations. If abbreviations are required, define them on first mention in the text.

DO NOT

- Do not cite references in the abstract.
- Do not copy and paste the exact text from introduction, methods and conclusion to make the abstract. Write it as a separate new section.

KEYWORDS

- Give 3-4 keywords or short phrases after the abstract.
- Do not be too broad or too narrow in scope.
- Do not give abbreviations unless they are very unique.
- It will be a good idea to choose the keywords from Medical Subjects Headings (MeSH) given by the National Library of Medicine (NLM). These words are also used for indexing articles in PubMed.

TITLE PAGE

Title page is the first page of the manuscript which lists essential information about the manuscript and the authors.

Include the following in the title page:

- Type of manuscript (Review Article, Original Article, Case Report etc.).
- Title of manuscript.
- Short running title of less than 40 characters including spaces.
- Names of all authors in order of appearance as: First name, middle name, last name followed by highest academic degree.
- Institutional affiliations of all authors including position in the department, name of department, name of institute, institute address, phone no, fax no and email ID.
- Number the affiliations in consecutive order and match the name of the author to his/her affiliation using superscript numbers.
- Name of the corresponding author.
- Corresponding author's address, phone no, fax no and email ID.
- Name of the guarantor of submission (if required).
- If the guarantor of submission is someone other than the corresponding author then give the name separately followed by address, phone no, fax no and email ID.
- Source of support like grants, funding, materials, chemicals.
- Give conflict of interest.
- Give authorship contributions (can also be placed before the references).
- Give acknowledgements (can also be placed before the references).

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

For everyone's peace of mind and to maintain goodwill, decide on the number of authors, names of authors and order of authors before beginning to write the manuscript.

Name of the senior most author or head of research group or department chair usually appears as the last author. If the study is very novel and groundbreaking, the senior most author or head of the research group may like to have his/her name listed as the first author.

Authorship credits are an individual's contribution to the study. The authorship credits are given based on strictly defined criteria. If contribution of an author does not fit into the given criteria, the individual should not be listed as author of the manuscript. They can however, be listed in the acknowledgements.

The authorship for scientific articles is assigned based on the following criteria:

- 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
- 3) final approval of the version to be published.

Authors must meet conditions 1, 2, and 3 (minimum one contribution from points 1, 2, and 3 above).

All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in the acknowledgments section. (E.g. technical help, writing assistance, department chair)

Example:

Manuscript 1 has three authors - Mary Jackson, Jean Decarrie, Douglas Rivard

Incorrect authorship credits:

Mary Jackson

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data

Group 2 - drafting the article, revising it critically for important intellectual content

Jean Decarrie

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data

Group 2 - drafting the article

Group 3 - final approval of the version to be published

Douglas Rivard

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data

Group 3 - final approval of the version to be published

Why Incorrect?

The above authorship credits are not correct as the credits of first author (Mary Jackson) are missing contribution from group 3 and credits of third author (Douglas Rivard) are missing contribution from group 2.

Remember: Authors must have at least one contribution from points 1, 2, and 3.

Correct authorship credits:

Mary Jackson

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data

Group 2 - drafting the article, revising it critically for important intellectual content

Group 3 - final approval of the version to be published

Jean Decarrie

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data

Group 2 - drafting the article

Group 3 - final approval of the version to be published

Douglas Rivard

Group 1 - substantial contributions to conception and design

Group 2 - drafting the article, revising it critically for important intellectual content

Group 3 - final approval of the version to be published

The above authorship credits are correct as all authors have been assign at least one contribution from all three points (points 1, 2, and 3) given above.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Acknowledge persons who contributed to completion of the study and manuscript preparation.
- Acknowledge people who helped in the study but whose contribution does not qualify for authorship.
- Acknowledge technical help, financial help and material support.
- If acknowledging any person by name, get a written permission from them allowing you to acknowledge them by name in your manuscript.

TITLE

The title must be:

- **Concise**
- **Interesting**
- **Specific**
- **Informative**

Reader should be able to read the title and get the focus of your study in 2-3 seconds. This is the time readers take to read a single title when glancing at the table of contents of a journal or a list of articles.

IMPORTANT

It was reported by Jacques et al.* that presence of a colon in the title of an article positively correlates with the number of citations of the article. So you might want to include a colon in the title of your manuscript. Some examples of titles with colon are:

- Focal nodular hyperplasia and hepatocellular adenomas: What is new in 2013
- Pancreaticoduodenectomy after Roux-en-Y gastric bypass: A single institution retrospective case series
- Primary pancreatic lymphoma: A diagnostic conundrum

*Jacques TS, Sebire NJ. The impact of article titles on citation hits: an analysis of general and specialist medical journals. JRSM Short Rep. 2010;1:2.

TO DO

- Title must be short – sufficiently short to be understood easily.
- Title must be long – sufficiently long to be informative and attract attention.
- Keep the language as simple and as unambiguous as possible.
- Spell out alphabets and symbols (“alpha” instead of “ α ”).
- Give a short running title of 40 characters or less including letters and spaces.

DO NOT

- Do not try to be mysterious.
- Do not try to be funny.
- Do not try to be too clever.
- Do not use abbreviations unless absolutely necessary.

COVER LETTER

Address cover letter to Editor (Editor-in-Chief) of the journal.

In the cover letter write the following.

- Type of the manuscript
- Title of the manuscript
- Short summary of the work, its importance, its contributions (one paragraph, 5-10 lines)
- Why is the journal most suited for your manuscript? (one paragraph, 5-10 lines)
- Full details if the manuscript has been presented previously, or published in a conference
- Name, address, contact number and email ID of the corresponding author
- It is a good idea to include names, addresses, contact number and email ID's of all the authors of the manuscript

TO DO

- Keep it brief
- Keep it polite
- Keep it sincere
- Keep it to the point

DO NOT

- Do not try to flatter
- Do not try to show-off
- Do not try to exaggerate

ASK THE EDITORS

Instructions for authors given on a journal's website are a valuable resource for writing and formatting your manuscript specifically for that journal. If you have any further questions about manuscript preparation for any journal you can:

1. See previously published articles to see the journal style
2. Email your query to the editorial office

STEP III

REWRITING THE MANUSCRIPT

Writing a manuscript is exhausting. One you have completed the first draft of your manuscript, leave it aside for a few days. This gives you a chance to relax and recharge your mental batteries. However, don't leave it for too long otherwise you may lose the tempo and when you start rewriting, everything will appear new.

Rewrite your manuscript after 3 – 4 days of completing the first draft.

While rewriting your manuscript:

- **Be your harshest critic.**
- **Be extremely critical of each word, sentence, paragraph, table, graph and figure.**
- Check for deficiencies in logic, accuracy of data, missed words and reversed facts.
- Check for flow of ideas from paragraph to paragraph and from one section to another.
- Cut out anything that appears superfluous, out of place or which obstructs the flow of ideas.
- If required, rearrange sentences and paragraphs.
- Make the manuscript as succinct and crisp as you can make it. Then do it once again, then do it once again and then do it once again.

Continue rehashing and rewriting your manuscript until either:

- **you are so pleased with your manuscript that you start smiling when you read it, or**
- **you are so fed up with rewriting that you throw up your hands and say – “Enough, I have done my best.”**

STEP IV

CIRCULATING THE MANUSCRIPT

One of the criteria for assigning authorship is that the author “gave final approval for the version to be published”. This is only possible if your co-authors read the manuscript and give their approval for publication. So, it is important to circulate the draft of your manuscript to all your co-authors. Another reason for circulating the manuscript is to get critique from your co-authors.

Before sending the manuscript for critique, take permission from the co-authors and ask for an explicit time range by which the review will be completed.

In your email specify the purpose of review. You may want the department chair to give you a holistic review of the manuscript but you may want co-author from a different specialty to concentrate more on specific sections of the manuscript. After you receive the critique, thank the co-authors.

After you have received the comments of your co-authors, go back to section III and rewrite your manuscript. **There might be so many comments that you may have to practically rewrite the whole manuscript to incorporate the comments of your co-authors.**

After you have received the comments, and before revising your manuscript, lock your ego in a trunk. Remember, ego and excellence do not go together.

If you differ in opinion with any comment, discuss with your co-authors about how best to incorporate their views into the manuscript.

The manuscript may need two or more rounds of such critique and rewritings. Don't feel overwhelmed by so many revisions and rewritings. Writing a manuscript is always an instructive and educative learning experience. The more you work on it, the more experience you will gain, which will help you a lot writing future manuscripts.

If you think about this your choice is very simple:

OPTION 1: Have your manuscript extensively criticized by your co-authors

RESULT 1: A better manuscript with increased chances of acceptance

OPTION 2: Have your manuscript extensively criticized by editors and reviewers

RESULT 2: Increased chances of rejection

Be smart, choose co-authors every time.

MOST COMMON ERRORS IN PREPARING A MANUSCRIPT

- Manuscript not divided into sections as per instructions
- Author affiliations missing
- Abstract not as per instructions
- Abstract too short or too long
- Abbreviations not defined on first mention
- Authorship criteria not defined properly
- Laboratory values missing
- Laboratory values have wrong units
- Normal laboratory reference range not given
- Units of laboratory values are not as per instructions (SI units versus conventional units)
- Patient identifying data in images
- Masking not present in images of the patients
- Important areas in images not identified by arrows/symbols
- Table legends missing
- Figure legends missing
- Figure legends presents but figures missing (Yes it happens!!)
- Table legends too short
- Figure legends too short
- Table legends lack enough detail
- Figure legends lack enough detail
- Multiple figures have same legend
- Magnification not given in legend of microscopic images
- Type of stain not given in legend of microscopic images
- Measurement scale not given in histopathology/cytology/electron microscopy/clinical images
- Annotations on figures too small
- All tables not cited in the text
- All figures not cited in the text
- All references not cited in the text
- References not cited as per instructions
- References not formatted as per journal style

TOP REASONS FOR REJECTION OF A MANUSCRIPT

- Hypothesis is wrong
- Hypothesis is not interesting
- Hypothesis is not answered
- Methodology and hypothesis do not match
- No novel findings in the study
- Duplication of previous published work
- Small sample size
- Errors in statistical analysis
- Over interpretation of results
- Outdated review of literature
- Conclusion not supported by data
- Poor manuscript writing style and language
- Bad ethical practices
 - Falsification
 - Fabrication
 - Plagiarism
 - Duplicate publication

STEP V

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT FOR PUBLICATION

Once the manuscript is finalized, it is time to submit it to a journal for publication. To choose a journal for submitting your manuscript you will have to consider many criteria, some of which are:

MAJOR CRITERIA

- Specialty: Choose a journal which belongs to the specialty of your manuscript
- Scope of the journal: This influences the chances of acceptance of your manuscript and defines who reads your manuscript.
- Journals which have published similar studies in the past 2-3 years are more likely to accept your manuscript. It will be better to avoid submitting if a journal has published a similar study within the last six months to a year unless your study has markedly divergent findings.

MINOR CRITERIA

- Publication cost: For open access journals this may be a factor but almost all open access journals provide fee waivers to authors and you just have to ask for it.

- Indexing and Impact Factor: Some authors consider whether a journal is indexed in an indexing service and whether a journal has an impact factor. The opinion differ so much from author to author that these two criteria are almost a personal choice. We leave these to you.

STEP VI

RESPONDING TO PEER REVIEWER'S COMMENTS

When you spend months writing and perfecting your manuscripts and then editors and reviewers tear it apart in their comments, find faults with the methods, results and presentation of data; it is natural to feel agitated and be critical of their views.

How can a peer reviewer read your manuscript in a few days and find faults with it when you have spent weeks and months writing, discussing and revising it?

REMEMBER

In the manuscript publication process, editors and reviewers are your friends. They are not trying to find reasons to reject your manuscript. They are trying to make your manuscript as perfect as it possibly can, before they present it to the world to read. They do this by their voluntary services as editors and reviewers of a journal, without any compensation or reward.

How many people do you know who want you to excel, who help you to excel, and do it free?

If your manuscript comes back with a request for revisions it means that:

- it was not rejected outright
- editor has not made a final decision about acceptance or rejection
- this is a second chance for you to explain and defend your study protocol and results
- your study or presentation of your study has some lacunae which need to be corrected before it can be published and read by everyone
- it is better to correct the lacunae now than keep responding to Letters to Editors submitted by readers who found faults with your study
- if you respond well there is a high chance that your manuscript will be accepted after revisions

When you receive the reviewer's comments:

- Study the comments to understand what the editor and peer reviewers are trying to tell you.

- Revise the manuscript according to their comments.
- Do more experiments; add, delete or rearrange data; explain facts and make other changes as advised.
- Give a point-by-point response to comments. Specifically state what changes were made. Give line and page numbers, table, figure and reference numbers as required.
- **Highlight all the changes made in the text by a different font color, otherwise no one will be able to figure out what was added or revised.**
- Do not miss or ignore any points.
- If you cannot or do not want to do something advised by the editor or peer reviewers, give a polite rebuttal and explain your stand by giving supporting facts and reasons.
- Thank the reviewers for their suggestions.

THE DAY OF FINAL RESULT

If your manuscript is rejected:

- Take it as a learning experience for current and future manuscripts.
- Analyze the editorial and peer reviewers' comments and your responses to see what went amiss.
- Revise your manuscript as best as you can and submit it to another journal.

If your manuscript is accepted for publication:

A BIG CHEERS!!!

Celebrate your success with your family, friends and colleagues.

Thank everyone for their help in your success and be ready for still greater challenges.

Send a letter to the Editor and editorial staff thanking them for improving and publishing your article. Make them feel appreciated for their hard work. Very few authors do this.

And finally...HELP OTHERS

To improve your skills in writing scientific papers, take the opportunity to serve as a peer reviewer for journals in your specialty.





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