

PUBLISHING YOUR RESULTS: TIPS & ADVICE

AN OUTLINE OF A RESEARCH MANUSCRIPT

ABSTRACT

- Stay within the word count and be brief, but succinct

INTRODUCTION

- Review the field or problem area succinctly; don't repeat the obvious
- Acknowledge different theories or approaches
- Identify gaps in the knowledge base
- Explain why new knowledge is helpful/essential to the issue
- List your hypotheses which must match what came before

METHOD

- Describe the sample: age, gender, race, ethnicity, location, etc.
- Ensure human subjects review
- Describe the measures used
- Describe the analytical/statistical approaches undertaken

RESULTS

- Only list the results relevant to the hypotheses and measures used

DISCUSSION

- Tell how the results add knowledge to the field +/- or relate to the hypotheses
- List limitations of the methodology, sample, generalizability of findings

CONCLUSIONS

- Succinctly list the positive and negative findings
- Discuss next steps

REFERENCES

- Only list the most recent and relevant publications

TABLES/FIGURES

- They should be self-explanatory and easy to read

THE REVIEW PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW

Step 1: Know the Journal

- Read the "Instructions to Authors" carefully
- Be respectful of page limits & word counts
- " " " formatting style (e.g., APA)
- " " " copyright transfer statements
- " aware " average review time guidelines
- " " " submission guidelines (# of copies; signatures; statements)
- " " " the type and topics of manuscripts they publish (reviews; data; clinical)

Step 2: The Manuscript

- Triple-check for spelling errors and grammar/syntax in text and references
- Be sure that all the references in text match the references in list
- " " " references are in the correct format for that journal
- " " " all the tables and figures are properly labeled and numbered
- " " " you send the proper # of manuscripts +/- the electronic version

Step 3: Sending the Manuscript

- Check & double-check the mailing addresses (e-mail or street)
- Look for a received confirmation acknowledgement

Step 4: The Review Process

- Different journals do it differently -some use first readers; checklists; scales

Step 5: A Reviewer's Checklist

1. Does the paper contain new findings or timely ideas?
2. Are the findings or ideas important to the field of suicidology?
3. Is the paper clearly written without excessive jargon?
4. Do the title and abstract adequately summarize the content of the paper?
5. Are the references appropriate and up-to-date for the subjects discussed?
6. Given the substance of the material, is the paper of appropriate length?
7. Is the paper's purpose, hypotheses, or issues addressed clearly stated?
8. Are the methods and design sound?
9. Are the sample and sampling method adequately described?
10. Are the clinical diagnoses clear?
11. Are definitions of suicidal ideation, intent, attempts, etc. clearly stated?
12. Are data collection instruments, including questionnaires, clearly described?
13. Is the research design adequate to achieve the stated objective of the study?
14. Is the opinion of a statistician/expert in research design needed?
15. Are the results clearly presented (e.g. Are the important results highlighted)?
16. Are the tables/figures useful? Which, if any, could be deleted?
17. Are the conclusions adequately supported by the data?

Step 6: A Reviewer's Response

- Summary of the manuscript and its main points/findings
- Strengths of the paper
- General conceptual or design problems
- Specific problems
- Areas needing more or less detailed coverage
- Aspects requiring more qualification or more emphasis

Step 7: Editorial Decisions and Feedback to Authors

- An editorial decision is based on many factors (see below)
- " " " a synthesis of reviewers' comments

Step 8: Your Response to Reading the Letter

- A good review doesn't mean it is a publishable paper in that journal
- Accept that the peer-review process is fair, but not perfect

- Do not argue with the Editor-in-Chief, UNLESS you have a VERY strong case

Step 9: Revisions

- Requesting a revision is not equal to a guaranteed acceptance
- Do what is asked of you OR supply a good reason why not
- Do not ignore criticisms, recommendations, suggestions, critiques
- The cover letter should address each and every criticism and recommendation
- The cover letter should not be defensive, argumentative, or self-promoting

THINGS YOU OFTEN DON'T KNOW IN ADVANCE

- Topical area may not be of particular interest to journal
- Journal may have already devoted sufficient space to it already
- Topic may be covered in other related journals
- Manuscripts on similar topic may already be in revision or accepted
- Editorial positions re: acceptance rates, diversity of topical areas, "currency" of topic

AN INSIDER'S 'WORDS OF CAUTION AND REFLECTION

Because suicide prevention is a relatively new and small field, many reviewers are on more than one Editorial Board of "sister" journals, and often also review for other more general mainstream journals in their primary field of study (e.g., psychology; psychiatry). As a result, the reviewers are often pretty aware of the field and what areas are at the "cutting edge" of advancing the field. Not only are they reading the published literature, but they are also doing their own research, attending conferences and listening to lectures, as well as reading many unpublished manuscripts related to their own work. Hence, most often their assessments are well-founded. Most reviewers are part of the "academy," and one of the joys of reviewing is to help authors hone their ideas, convey their findings, and get published. Reviewing takes up lots of time, and it is a "labor of love." No one gets paid to be a reviewer.

If your manuscript has been rejected by one journal, and you contemplate sending it to another related journal, please first revise the manuscript according to the critiques already received (since it is possible that the same reviewer from the last journal may be seeing your manuscript again when submitted to the next journal). No one wants to see that the work they put into a review has been ignored by the author.

Don't give up. There is a home for almost every manuscript. Try not to be offended when you receive a rejection; instead, try to learn from the reviews and comments of your peers. Most manuscripts are salvageable, or at least re-workable, if the authors are dedicated and persevere regarding finding the right journal for the study. Remember: Only a rare few amongst us make discoveries and have insights worthy of the Nobel Prize, so you should see your contribution as incrementally advancing our field. Don't become overly invested in your findings. Don't lose sight of how prevention science advances. It advances slowly.

...But don't forget, even Albert Einstein had a hard time getting his initial papers published.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 1) An archived webinar on "All You Ever Wanted to Know about Journal Publishing." This webinar was presented by Dr. Barry Pless, a pediatrician and editor of the journal "Injury Prevention", which is published by the British Medical Journals group [www.injuryprevention.bmj.com]. Barry was (now retired) a wise and witty editor, and his presentation was full of pragmatic advice about how to select a journal, prepare your paper, and more. The webinar can be found by scrolling almost to the bottom of this page: http://www.circl.pitt.edu/home/past_seminars.htm [it was originally presented 5/11/04]. At this link, you can view the PowerPoint and listen to the archived audio, including discussion that followed the presentation.
- 2) The American Medical Writers Association has a webpage full of useful links to online resources, associations, reference tools, and more. See: <http://www.amwa.org/default.asp?id=269>.